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This special issue contains the following articles: (1) "Critiquing the Center: Rigoberta Menchu and Enrique Dussel" (Joseph R. Hoff); (2) "Caroline Maria De Jesus: A Testimonial Voice in the Wilderness" (Eva Bueno); (3) "Latin American Women's Voices: La Malinche to Rigoberta Menchu" (Ana Maria Romo de Mease); (4) "China in Borges' 'The Garden of Forking Paths'" (Bettye S. Walsh); (5) "Julio Cortazar: Political Action and His Last Fiction" (Isolina Battistozzi); (6) "The Violence of Memory: Excavating Truth, Unearthing Identity in 'Ashes of Izalco'" (Karen McGovern); (7) "The Inquisition Case of Mauricia Josepha De Apelo: Questioning Identity" (Magali M. Carrera); (8) "Narrator's Mask(s) and Text's Metamorphosis: Some Keys for the Latin American's Narrative in the '80's" (Hiber Conteris); (9) "Introducing Latin American Culture with Short Stories: First Person Narratives as 'I' Openers" (Donovan Johnson); (10) "Teaching Narrative Structure and Post Dirty War Argentine History through Luis Puenzo's 'The Official Story'" (Terry Krueger); (11) "Teaching Approaches to Rosario Ferre's 'Sweet Diamond Dust'" (Nora Erro-Peralta); (12) "Changing the Canon: Introductory Literature Courses as Stepping Stones" (Ann M. Wellington); (13) "Multiple Realities in Mario Vargas Llosa's 'The Storyteller'" (Diane Kamali); and (14) "Latin American Fiction: A Selected Bibliography" (Kay Gerard). (VWC)

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# Community College Humanities Review

# Latin American Literature & Cultures

## August 1996

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## SPECIAL 2 ISSUE

Articles From the National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute
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THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE HUMANITIES REVIEW

Special Issue Fall, 1996

# LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURES AND CULTURES: SELF AND SOCIETY

Papers from the Summer Institute Held at the
University of California - San Diego

Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities

Sponsored by
The Community College Humanities Association

Institute Co-directors: Patricia Grignon and Virginia Meyn
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IN MEMORIAM

PATRICIA GRIGNON

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction: Virginia Meyn 1

Critiquing the Center: Rogoberta Menchú and Enrique Dussell 5
Joseph R. Hoff

Caroline Maria De Jesus: A Testimonial Voice in the Wilderness 14
Eva Bueno

Latin American Women's Voices: La Malinche to Rigoberta Menchú 33
Ana Maria Romo de Mease

China in Borges' "The Garden of Forking Paths" 46
Bettye S. Walsh

Julio Cortázar: Political Action and His Last Fiction 56
Isolina Battistozzi

The Violence of Memory: Excavating Truth, Unearthing Identity in *Ashes of Izalco* 66
Karen McGovern

The Inquisition Case of Mauricia Josepha De Apelo: Questioning Identity 79
Magali M. Carrera

Narrator's Mask(s) and Text's Metamorphosis: Some Keys for the Latin American's Narrative in the '80's 89
Hiber Conteris

Introducing Latin American Culture with Short Stories: First Person Narratives as "I" Openers 97
Donovan Johnson

Teaching Narrative Structure and Post Dirty War Argentine History Through Luis Puenzo's *The Official Story* 109
Terry Krueger

Teaching Approaches to Rosario Ferré's *Sweet Diamond Dust* 119
Nora Erro-Peralta

Changing the Canon: Introductory Literature Courses as Stepping Stones 130
Ann M. Wellington

Multiple Realities in Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Storyteller* 146
Diane Kamali

Latin American Fiction: A selected Bibliography 156
Kay Gerard



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# LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURES AND CULTURES: SELF AND SOCIETY

*Virginia Meyn*

> I view NEH Institutes not solely as providers of knowledge but as seeds for the future. In our case this has meant new courses, new research and potential publications, new careers, refresher courses, new views on known material and the discovery of sights and texts previously unknown. The choreography . . . has been set up by the directors, scholars and lecturers; the rest is up to each of our participants and to what they have brought with them. (Saúl Sosnowski, in a letter to Virginia Meyn)

For five weeks last summer, twenty-five teachers from across the country gathered on the campus of UCSD in La Jolla to study with leading scholars in Latin American literatures and cultures in a NEH summer institute sponsored by the Community College Humanities Association. They came from community colleges, four-year colleges and universities. They came from literature and language, including ESL, history, art history, and philosophy. And they came with enthusiasm. Most had travelled in Latin American countries, and some were Latin Americans. Several were published authors. They all came to learn, but theirs was more than a learning session. This group launched a dialogue with a momentum of its own, a creative exchange of insights and impressions that would bear those "seeds for the future" that Professor Sosnowski described. They are, from what I hear, still talking.

The papers that follow are the offspring of some of those exchanges, born as much from long working lunches and afternoon readings on the lawn outside the university apartments as from intensive classroom seminars. They reflect the theme of the Institute, "Self and Society," particularly the search for origins, for an identity that is authentically "Latin American," and for the voices that express that identity.

The foundation for such a search is an understanding of the writer's role as the conscience of his/her people, their history and their struggles. Latin American history is deeply marked by the Spanish Conquest and the mix of racial and ethnic cultures that gave rise to persistent patterns of conflict and acculturation among European, African, and indigenous values; between urban and rural structures, formal Catholicism and syncretic folk beliefs, rich and poor, conqueror and vanquished, ruler and

ruled. The great twentieth century works of Latin American fiction have given voice to those struggles. So this literature and its history, limited specifically to the Spanish-speaking regions, were the focus of our Institute. Brazil was omitted because it involves a different language and culture and constitutes in itself a conglomerate of many literary expressions.

Each of the five weeks of the Institute was devoted to a specific region of Latin America: the Southern Cone, with emphasis on the River Plate region; the Andean region; Central America; the Caribbean and Colombia; Mexico. The lead scholars for these regions followed in this order: Saúl Sosnowski (University of Maryland), Regina Harrison (University of Maryland), Arturo Arias (San Francisco State University), Francine Masiello (UC Berkeley), Jean Franco (Columbia University). Nine guest lecturers brought in additional perspectives not only from literature and history but from anthropology, political science, art, and art history.

The papers that follow reflect a wide diversity of voices, informed by the principle that "what defines the Latin American identity is not one but many ways of being rooted in Latin American reality" (Doris Meyer *Lives on the Line*). We hear Rigoberta Menchú from Guatemala (Joseph Hoff) and Claribel Alegría from El Salvador (Karen McGovern); Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortázar, and Luis Puenzo from Argentina (Bettye Walsh, Isolina Battistozzi, and Terry Krueger), Rosario Ferré from Puerto Rico (Nora Erro-Peralta), Mario Vargas Llosa from Perú (Diane Kamali), Gabriel García Márquez from Colombia (Ann Wellington), Carolina María de Jesus from Brazil (Eva Bueno). Some essays deal with figures of cultural significance such as Mauricia Josepha de Apelo, an 18th century Mexican woman who, in innocently challenging the Inquisition, holds a mirror to the contradictory values of the dominant class of her society (Magali Carrera), and La Malinche, the "Mexican Eve" in the story of the Conquest. La Malinche, together with Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz of Mexico, Rigoberta Menchú, and Gabriela Mistral of Chile, provides the focus for a study of the diverse voices of Latin American women (Ana María Romo de Mease).

The papers also reflect a variety of purposes and perspectives in response to guidelines that welcomed a broad spectrum of approaches from theoretical explorations to teaching strategies. Thus they range from a study of theories of narrator function by Donovan Johnson, Joseph Hoff, and Hiber Conteris—an award-winning Uruguayan author—to Ann Wellington's annotated Introduction to Literature course, which offers a comparative perspective on fiction from various cultures, beginning with Julio Cortázar's story "The Night Face Up" and ending with Nobel Prize-

winner Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The papers are as broadly varied as a study of Borges' debt to China and Chinese fiction by Bettye Walsh and an essay based on interviews by Karen McGovern with Central American authors. They include an analysis of the Oscar-winning film *The Official Story* by Terry Krueger, an author of fiction and screenplays himself, who was a Fulbright lecturer in Argentina in 1985, the year the film came out.

That film dramatizes the theme of many of the papers. Hinging on a story of the "disappeared," it reveals the contradiction between the government's official version and the real story, amid the complexities of post-Dirty War Argentina and the political and social consequences of neoliberal economies in Latin America. This kind of contradiction between the accepted version and real story lies at the heart of Rosario Ferré's novella *Sweet Diamond Dust* (Nora Erro-Peralta). The official version of the story of the sugarcane industry in Puerto Rico, told by a male narrator, is subverted by the intruding voices of the female characters, whose versions are quite different.

While *The Official Story* is an ideal film with which to introduce students to Latin American realism, *Sweet Diamond Dust*, and the majority of the fiction studied in the papers, explores the more experimental forms of narrative associated with Latin American authors' attempts to reject models of European realism in search of a new and authentic voice. These forms create the illusion of *multiple realities* more expressive of the way the Latin American writer experiences his or her hybrid and richly textured culture, as the title of Diane Kamali's study of *The Storyteller* suggests.

The focus of the papers could be summarized as an attempt to introduce readings and narrative techniques that heighten one's awareness and de-center one's assumptions about cultural identity. The Introduction to Literature course, for example, is an effort to move students beyond the "comfortable binaries" of a Eurocentric world-view to a disquieting space where they can engage in a process that works to transform and expand their own sense of who they are. If this were only part of what the Institute has inspired, then it has more than achieved its purpose.

From a host of enthusiastic reports then and now, we can confirm that the Institute was indeed a great success, and we are grateful to our participants and our scholars, in particular to our academic director and consultant Saúl Sosnowski, for making it so. Our thanks go to the National Endowment for the Humanities for the generous funding that supported this grant project, and to Judy Jeffrey Howard for her unflagging energy and inspiration in our innumerable consultations over the years. We are grateful to our sponsors, the Community College Humanities Association, particularly David A. Berry, executive director,

Joeann Logan, office manager, and John Seabrook, editor of the *Review*.

Finally, I thank my dear colleague and co-worker Pat Grignon, without whose impetus some eight years ago this collective and cumulative project would not have been launched.

# CRITIQUING THE CENTER: RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ AND ENRIQUE DUSSEL

*Joseph R. Hoff*

## I

In many regions of the world, the last half of the twentieth century has witnessed an intense struggle for interpretive space. Literature and other cultural productions have assumed, in many instances, a counter-hegemonic face. This paper looks at two such counter-canonical efforts, one literary and one theological: *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* and Enrique Dussel's book, *Ethics and the Theology of Liberation*. Both texts present a critique of a modern world order in which one cultural entity has come to exert an hegemony over the rest of the world. It also looks at the agenda for liberation and salvation that Rigoberta Menchú and Enrique Dussel propose.

Menchú's *testimonio* and Dussel's theological tract are revolutionary books. Both writers, using different approaches, seek to expose, then challenge, and, ultimately, to dislodge, the master narrative that has framed the Latin American social, economic, political and literary landscape since the sixteenth century.

Menchú's *testimonio* maps a personal and collective landscape that is moving, unsettling, composed in a voice that is direct and unflinching in its reporting of the horrifying and insane atrocities committed against her own people. Dussel, on the other hand, has composed an analytical study of the way in which the west has circumscribed itself on the map of the world.

## II

On a very basic level, we can read Menchú's text as an introduction to the Quiche culture to which she belongs. Even at this level of reading, there is a revolutionary quality to the text. Hers is not an anthropological approach to the study of culture. Historically such approaches have come from an outsider, an observer, who provides an accounting of a culture. Because of the "outsider" status of the observer, the culture under observation comes to be viewed as "other," which is the end result of the " . . . obsolete binarism between anthropologist and native" (Suleri 274). It is also quite different from the sociological approach, mid-twentieth-century style, which one finds in Oscar Lewis' *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*. Nor is it a fictionalized/novelized approach to a particular culture and its specific issues, as in Jose Maria Argueda's *Ríos profundos* or Mario Vargas Llosa's *El hablador*. In the history of Latin American literature, a period encompassing some five hundred

years, this text by Menchú is one of the first accounts of an indigenous culture told by a person from within that culture (as amazing as that may seem!). It is a marginalized culture's own account of its attempts to survive in a world that is hostile to it.

In articulating this account, which in many different ways defies the literary tradition, it becomes necessary to find a literary form adequate and appropriate to the task.

> Do social struggles give rise to new forms of literature and culture, or is it more a question of the adequacy of their representation in existing forms? What happens when . . . there has been a complicity between the form literature assumes . . . and the deployment of forms of colonial and imperialist oppression against which many of these struggles are directed? (Beverly 69)

Menchú, like many other voices seeking to extend their range beyond the boundaries of their own cultural milieu, turns to the literary form of the *testimonio*. The *testimonio* allows the speaker, untrained in and outside of the literary traditions of the west, to find an entree into western literary culture.

> *Testimonio* implies the importance and power of literature as a form of social action, but also its radical insufficiency . . . [T]here are experiences in the world today that cannot be adequately expressed in [traditional literary genres], in other words, which would be betrayed or misrepresented by literature as we know it. In principle, *testimonio* appears therefore as an extraliterary or antiliterary form of discourse . . . . (Beverly and Zimmerman 178)

The *testimonio* asserts itself as a generic category within the framework of literature. Ultimately, as such, it validates the non-literary voice within a discourse that measures the importance of the text from a literary point of view. Thus, the voices of those from oral cultures are accorded a space within literary discourse.

Menchú, in her role both as protagonist and witness, introduces us to a world where the boundaries between men and women, between the natural world and the supernatural world, between individual and community, between the sacred and the profane, are configured in ways that are unique within the cultural landscape of the world. Menchú, in this portrait of her culture, outlines alternative approaches to the economic, political, social and gender constructs of the west. As one enters into the

Quiche culture with Menchú as a guide, one leaves behind the binary structures that gird western society. The non-binary quality of Quiche thought and culture and the re-configuration of discursive boundaries lead to a confrontation with and critique of contemporary and classical western ideology.

For example, the role and status of Quiche men and women challenge, at a certain level, western feminism, based as the latter is on principles and notions of equality, equal access and individual achievement. Individual achievement, so celebrated in western culture, and the attendant struggle to create a space in which to accomplish individually-designed goals, often are the focus of western feminist writing. But in a culture that inculcates the supremacy of community well-being over individual aspirations, gender roles are necessarily constructed differently. Among the Quiches, gender equality is not understood in terms of equal access. Men and women are inherently different. Their roles are different and differentiated. This is not to imply that Menchú does not challenge the paternalistic order, for she certainly does. However, approaches proposed by Menchú to confronting paternalism are different from western feminist approaches.

> Perhaps in the future, when there's a need for it, there will be a women's organisation in Guatemala. For the time being, though . . . we've found that when we discuss women's problems, we need the men to be present, so that they can contribute by giving their opinions of what to do about the problem. And so that they can learn as well . . . . (221–222)

Quiche feminism, perhaps a malapropism, begins with notions of solidarity between men and women. What Menchú proposes is not, as bell hooks so aptly describes it, a "phallocentric paradigm of liberation—wherein freedom and the experience of patriarchal manhood are always linked as if they are one and the same" (hooks 49). Menchú's liberation agenda calls into question the patriarchal nature of western feminist discourse, which, for some time, has been class- and race-specific. Western feminism has, until recently, been a discursive space where western white intellectual women have been " . . . the true 'subjects' . . . [and where] Third World women, on the other hand, never rise above the debilitating generality of their 'object' status" (Suleri 274–275).

Another example of Menchú's critical stance is her condemnation of the educational system of the dominant group. Formal education, the central socially-formative activity of the west, is categorically rejected by the Quiches. The Quiches see the educational system of the west, as it is actualized among the *ladinos*, as one more instrument of colonization.

Menchú's father explains to her, "'Unfortunately, if I put you in a school, they'll make you forget your class, they'll turn you into a ladino.'" (190).

In this passage, Menchú echoes the Brazilian writer-educator, Paolo Freire who, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, outlines the educational agenda of the oppressor, no matter his or her cultural identity.

> . . . the interest of the oppressors lie in "changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not the situation which oppresses them"; for the more the oppressed can be led to adapt to that situation, the more easily they can be dominated. . . The oppressed are regarded as the pathology of the healthy society, which must therefore adjust these "incompetent and lazy" folk to its own patterns by changing their mentality. These marginals need to be "integrated,""incorporated" into the healthy society that they have "forsaken." (55)

Freire's educational theories, like the testimonial narrative, validate the individual utterance, thus challenging the master narrative implicit in the "banking concept of education" which exists precisely to sustain the dominance of the center.

In taking control of their own education, in rejecting the educational model foisted upon them, the Quiches then begin the revolutionary task of seeking control of their own destiny, of becoming the shapers of their own history. As a step in this process, they must question their role within a historical discourse constructed by a colonial system. History itself is questioned. Its relative nature is exposed and, in being exposed, the center itself is challenged, if not de-stabilized.

Perhaps not so explicitly, but just as emphatically, Menchú critiques the value attached to literary (chirographic) cultures as opposed to oral cultures, both within literary and social discourses. However, one needs to always be cautious about using Menchú's text as an example of an oral culture since Menchú's narration has been "linearized" by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray in order to make it consumable by a literary culture. This presence of another voice problematizes the text. John Beverly, in his book *Against Literature*, notes that

> [t]he relation that Rigoberta Menchú and Elisabeth Burgos-Debray establish in the production of the *testimonio* in one sense enacts the relationship of humanism itself to subaltern cultures: it entails thus the possibility, in the manner familiar from the dialectic of master and slave, of the compiler manipulating the material the informant provides to suit her own political, intellectual,

> and aesthetic predilections, which are not necessarily those of the informant. (79)

Or, in Burgos-Debray's own words, "I allowed [Menchú] to speak and then became her instrument, her double by allowing her to make the transition from the spoken to the written word" (Menchú xx). The challenge to the interlocutor is to assist in this transition without substantively altering the form or the text of what is spoken.

Further, the English translation of the book poses particular problems. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the way the subject of the text asserts her self in the title in Spanish, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, whereas the English translation of the book's title posits a totally different stance: *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, a title which defines the subject of the text by socially-, racially-, politically-, and gender-constructed categories that diminish in many ways the affirmation of the self present in the Spanish title.

But, despite the theoretical problems one might associate with the text, Menchú's critique of the center speaks clearly and directly to the reader.

## III

In his book, *Ethics and the Theology of Liberation*, Enrique Dussel, reframes many of the issues that Menchú raises. Menchú is culture- and region-specific. Dussel, on the other hand, regards the same issues in a global context, examining the historical, economic, political and religious factors that have created a "center" and, in so doing, have transformed Latin America, along with other major geographic and cultural areas of the world, into the "periphery."

In his first chapter, Dussel provides a very succinct history of the construction of the center, all the while examining the ethical dimension of the process of construction. How can, and how did, the west, with its Judeo-Christian ethical system, justify the colonization of Latin America, Africa and Asia for so many years? And, how can the west justify the neo-colonial structure that exists today throughout most of Latin America, including Guatemala? How can a Christian/Catholic ethical system remain indifferent or blind to the enslavement and extermination of hundreds of thousands of indigenous people? How can a geo-political entity such as the west, with its stated commitment to freedom and democracy, continue to support and abet repressive military regimes? How can the ecumene (the center) ethically justify itself and its actions?

Like Rigoberta Menchú, Enrique Dussel challenges the hegemony of the west and the institutions which the west has imposed on regions such as Latin America, be they political structures, economic structures, social structures or the structures of religious systems. He "de-constructs"

the hierarchical structure of the western- (Spanish-) imposed systems, dismantling them, in order to find the foundations upon which they rest. Once the foundation of these systems is revealed, he focuses an intense light on each of its constituent parts in order to see how they fit together, how they contribute to structures which, in the end, sacralize western constructs and which marginalize and exclude indigenous constructs. The system, under Dussel's gaze, can no longer hide itself behind its own structure, behind its own visage.

In this regard, Dussel is different from Menchú: Menchú provides us with a portrait of the end result of marginalization; Dussel looks at the process itself. Both, however, seek avenues for escaping the processes which enable(d) one culture to dominate and, through domination, transform, alter and eventually destroy, another culture.

Like Menchú, Dussel writes and speaks with the language of the dominant group. Menchú learned Spanish in order to confront and challenge the ladinos on their own linguistic terrain. Dussel uses the lexicon of Catholic theology but his starting point is radically different from traditional Latin American Catholic theology. The latter has always focused on the metaphysical and the eschatological. Dussel has little use for this approach. His theology is rooted in *praxis*. This alters, then, the focus of theology. It removes it from the rarefied atmosphere of the highly-metaphysical, scholastic traditions of Catholic theology and situates it directly in the social, economic and historical realities of Latin America. Rather than articulating itself in universal terms, it becomes highly specific, localized and situational. In other words, borrowing from the vocabulary of linguistics, Dussel's analysis is spoken as a Sausurrean *parole*, challenging the notions inherent in western theology which is cast in the light of the Sausurrean *langue*.

Dussel takes the reader through a whirlwind analysis of the processes by which the world has created centers and peripheries, from an earlier period when there were multiple centers and peripheries (centers need always have a periphery since a center loses its significance without a periphery) to the modern period when one culture establishes itself as the one and only center, the world's most powerful "ecumene." His critique begins, and in some regards ends, with an examination of the origins of property. According to Dussel, there are three ways to acquire property: "(1) I work to get my property; (2) I steal, like the English pirates and the modern Europeans; and in this way I get property; (3) I inherit. There is nothing to justify the last two. Only the first is valid" (25).

Menchú's position in regard to the economic issues of land ownership and property acquisition resonates with exactly the same conclusion. The western system and the system of the ladinos in Guatemala which has its origin in the west and has found its political support from the west, have secured their superior economic and political position through

the cultivation of the latter two means of acquiring property and have relegated the first way to a position of no importance. Those who live on the periphery are assigned the role of working the land and do so industriously, but really to no avail. "[T]here are rich people and there are poor. The rich have become rich because they took what our ancestors had away from them, and now they grow fat on the sweat of our labour" (Menchú, 121).

Inheritance and "theft" ("theft," in Dussel's parlance, includes the "disinterested" act of buying and selling what one has not produced, e.g., the actions of commodities markets, state appropriation of land, manipulation of land value by real estate markets, etc.) are justifiable only when property (nature) is understood as commodity. Commodification of the natural world is only possible when the individual or the group is willing to relegate nature to the level of "other." In so doing, the individual and/or the group strips nature of its spiritual dimension, leaving it denuded and vulnerable to violation.

> Land, [which] provides material sustenance and embodies Dios Mundo (earth god), cannot be owned or exploited instrumentally. The [Quiche] child undergoes certain rites to purify his hands so that he may never rob (i.e., take from the community, the social body) . . . .
> (Beverly and Zimmerman 203)

The revolutionary task of the Quiches and the underclasses of Latin America is to restore the dialogical encounter between the land and those who inhabit it. The obstacles in accomplishing this are tremendous. Neither Dussel nor Menchú believe that the economic model of "development" will lead to this re-engaged dialogue, so critical for leading to social justice. "Developmentalism" is seen as just another tactic on the part of the center to extend its influence. The results of the "development" model have been documented in many places: "debt crisis, inflation, runaway shops, unplanned urbanization, and even more desperate poverty" (Franco 161). However, once the dialogue is re-established, those who are scorned by the center for their role in the economy (those who work on the land) will be validated; those who scorn will be de-valued.

The economic system which has dominated Guatemala since colonization tears at the fabric of the Quiche culture. But it tears just as tenaciously at the seams of Christian ethics. Because the economic system is unethical in Christian terms as well, it must be sinful. But the Christian system has created hierarchies of sin, so that one sin is judged in degree by other sins. In this way, Christendom, as opposed to Christianity, has avoided discussions of collective sin and has, instead, "privileged" individual acts. In this way, it has been able to protect itself as an institution from the ethical scrutiny to which it may have otherwise been subjected.

The end result is that " . . . sin has become a very private affair, but the great historic and communitarian sins of humankind pass unnoticed by all" (Dussel 27). In his "de-constructive" approach, then, Dussel wipes away the hierarchy, concluding that there really is and never has been more than one sin, from which all other sins derive; that sin is the objectification of the other.

For Dussel, the necessary first step in achieving freedom is to expose the center for what it is; he calls this first step "destructive criticism," which then needs to be followed by "liberation criticism," an agenda for positive action that will lead to a new order of things. In his thinking, liberation is rooted in a sense of *"disponabilite,"* that is, being available to the other.

> Liberating praxis has its origin from the Other as other. It is service to the poor who are outside the system, who are beyond the ends and the laws of the system. Today it means serving the peoples on the periphery, wanting the liberation of those peoples. When we want, and commit ourselves to, the liberation of the peoples of Latin America, we enter into salvation history. (40)

The center has taught people on the periphery that salvation lies outside of historical time and that, because it is ahistorical, there are no mechanisms available within history for the achievement of liberation. "[T]hey also taught us to accept many things, to be passive, to be a dormant people. Their religion told us it was a sin to kill while we were being killed. They told us that God is up there and that God had a kingdom for the poor" (Menchú, 121).

For both the political activist, Menchú, and the radical theologian, Dussel, the move toward liberation and social and economic justice requires an understanding and acceptance of cultures on the periphery; western epistemologies, ontologies, philosophies and theologies are insufficient to the task since they (1) effectively close their eyes to what actually goes on in the periphery, and (2) are trapped in their own theoretical system. "Now the model is no longer imitation of the center but, rather, the proposal of a new person based on an understanding of the world system" (Dussel 165). This "new person" will develop a new model for liberation that will arise, according to Menchú and Dussel, from the dialogue between peoples that have never been allowed to speak.

> The correct method for a revolutionary leadership to employ in the task of liberation is, therefore, <u>not</u> *(sic)* "libertarian propaganda." Nor can the leadership merely "implant" in the oppressed a belief in freedom, thus

> thinking to win their trust. The correct method lies in dialogue. The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own *conscientizacao*. (Freire 49)

Or, as Menchú, in a much more direct way, says, "A child is only given food when he demands it. A child who makes no noise, gets nothing to eat" (219).

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# CAROLINA MARIA DE JESUS: A TESTIMONIAL VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

*Eva Bueno*

When Rigoberta Menchú's testimony *I, Rigoberta Menchú: an Indian Woman from Guatemala* appeared in English translation in 1984, it immediately caused a sensation. Not only did the academic establishment adopt it as the foremost example of the genre, but the general public began reading it for its documentary value. For many, it was the very first time they entered in contact with the "voice" of a representative of an oppressed race. As a result of the book's success, courses were taught at several universities, sessions were (and are being) held in conferences, articles were written, and books were published on the subject of testimony. To judge from the euphoria in some publications, it was as if, suddenly, and for the first time, the world could finally set its hands and eyes and ears on an "authentic" voice of the other.

Even though in the academic environment it was clear that Menchú's book constituted but one example in a series of other publications with the purpose of giving a representational space to a person of a silenced group, the studies of testimony concentrate mainly on either Rigoberta Menchú's or on the 1978 book by Domitila Barrios de Chungara, *Let Me Speak!*, as examples of the tribal communities and social groups they belong to. Other examples of *testimonio* are given as a "by-the-way" example. The interest on the subject sparked by this book has been such that the MLA and other related associations have had special sessions covering aspects such as the teaching and political impact of Rigoberta's testimony.

As I see it, these books were received with such surprise and enthusiasm by the North American public and academics alike because of two issues which they discuss: race and gender. In turn, each of these two issues is tied up with others. As political issues go, timing is everything; the proximity to the 1992 commemoration of the 500 years of the discovery was, I believe, crucial for the reception of *testimonio*, especially Rigoberta Menchú's book. In this discussion I want to explore these matters using the example furnished by three books: Carolina Maria de Jesus's *Child of the Dark*, Domitila Barrios de Chungara's *Let Me Speak!*, and Rigoberta Menchú's *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. Of course, I must say at the outset that I believe the plight of the people the three women come from is equally important: the poor in Brazil, the miners in Bolivia, as well as the Guatemalan Indians, all deserve the respect and protection any group needs in order to lead fulfilling lives. I also believe that the international

attention that Rigoberta Menchú attracted with her book-testimonial has brought relief to her people and to other Indian communities as well.

Yet, we need to study these texts as texts, and to investigate how their reception was determined by factors outside the fact of their author's worthiness and need for justice. Carolina's account, unknown in the studies of "*testimonios*"—it is, after all, a diary—was written by the author herself, "discovered" by a man, and transformed into a book without her participation in the editing and final preparation of the text.

It all started in April, 1958, when Audálio Dantas, then a young reporter working with a local newspaper, met Carolina Maria de Jesus in a ceremony for the inauguration of a playground near Canindé, in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. She was one of the residents in a slum nearby. What called his attention to her was the fact that, in an argument with some adults who were taking the children's place in the playground toys, she threatened to put their names in her book. Curious about this "book," Dantas made friends with Carolina, and after gaining her confidence, was shown the "book." It consisted of several notebooks filled with two kinds of texts. In one, there were her "stories," in the other were her diaries. Dantas discarded the fictional stories as childish fantasies, but the diaries interested him immensely. He took them to his newspaper office and published excerpts in the paper. It took two years from these first publications until the final, book-form manuscript.

When *Quarto de Despejo* (literally "room where garbage is dumped") appeared in print, the initial 10,000 copies were sold in three days. "...in less than six months 90,000 copies were sold in Brazil and today it is still on the best-seller list, having sold more than any other Brazilian book in history" (Translator's Preface 13). Carolina, we're told, used the profits from the book to fulfill one of her most cherished dreams: to buy a brick house. But finally she died in poverty.[1]

In 1978 Domitila Barrios de Chungara, a woman of the Bolivian Andes, wife of a miner and mother of seven children, had her story told in print through the agency of Moema Viezzer. The book, which in English has the somewhat authoritative title of *Let me Speak!*, in Spanish has the more tentative, almost plaintive title *Si me permiten hablar. . . (If you allow me to speak. . .)*. "The idea for this testimony," Viezzer writes in the introduction to the book, "arose out of the presence of Domitila Barrios de Chungara at the International Women's Year Tribunal, organized by the United Nations and held in Mexico in 1975" (9). The material for the book was collected through Viezzer's interviews with Domitila in Mexico and Bolivia, her speeches at the Tribunal, conversations, dialogues, and discussions she had with several groups of people, including Latin American exiles living in Mexico, representatives of the press, radio and television.

In 1983 the Editorial Argos Vergara, of Barcelona, published, in Spanish, *Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú Y Así me Nació La Conciencia*. The book was quickly translated into English as I. . . *Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. Like Domitila, Rigoberta also spoke about her life to another woman, Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, who then transcribed the taped conversations and organized them into the book we now know.

The success of Rigoberta's book was immediate and sensational. It both brought international attention to the situation of the Guatemalan Indians and added urgency to the need to study such *testimonio*. It is as if this text was born not only to become canon, but to be it. The rest is history: classes were taught, books written, and conferences were held on the subject. It would seem that a real bonanza of representational space had finally opened up for the oppressed of the Americas. However, as issue thirty-six of *Revista de crítica literaria latinoamericana* demonstrates, the emphasis has rested basically on the Spanish American *testimonio*. Robert Carr, who has an essay in the *Revista*, mentions this fact in his comparison of Menchú's *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, and Honor Ford-Smith's *Lionheart Gal*. He remarks that, whereas Menchú's book enjoyed successive re-editions, Ford Smith's book, about a Jamaican woman, has had few and occasional reprintings. Carr, although acknowledging that the reasons for this difference are very complex, attributes it to the "growing interest in Central and Latin America" as opposed to the considerably lesser interest in the Caribbean ("Re-presentando el *Testimonio*" 82).

I agree with Carr that the reasons for this interest in the testimonials from Central and Latin America on the part of the US are very complex, but I would like to suggest some ways to understand this different status for texts which do, obviously, try to give voice to the oppressed. It is as if the moment testimonials became subjects for study, the political moment privileged authors who belonged to Native American ethnic groups. Not just any Native American: exclusively Indians who do not inhabit the United States (or Canada).[2] At this point, it interests me to know what has determined that such be the case, and what kind of understanding the outside world has of these ethnic groups and of their communities which allows it to accept these women's testimonies as the truth about a whole group of people. More specifically, which historical factors have contributed to this comparatively easier acceptance of testimonials from people of "below the Rio Grande" Indian heritage and not from those of Black origin?

In the rest of this discussion, I want to present a comparison between these books by Carolina, Domitila and Rigoberta, and try to see the reasons—besides the obvious technical differences between a "testimony" and a "diary"—why the two women of Indian heritage are the

ones who are accepted as witnesses while Carolina never enjoyed such status. "Subalternity" alone will not explain the difference, since all three belong to "subaltern" groups. Will race explain it, then? Domitila and Rigoberta both belong to those peoples sociologist Darcy Ribeiro terms "Witness People": "survivors of **high autonomous civilizations that suffered the impact of European expansion**. They are modern survivals of the traumatizing action of that expansion and of their effort at ethnic reconstitution as modern national societies" (80, my emphasis). The Witness People are, for Ribeiro, in India, China, Japan, Korea, Indochina, the Islamic countries; and, in the Americas "they are represented by Mexico, Guatemala, and the peoples of the Andean highlands, the two former being survivors of the Aztec and Maya civilizations, the latter of the Inca" (81).

What stands up in this neat explanation is the adjective **high**, used to qualify autonomous civilizations, and Ribeiro's choice to exclude Africans from the Witness peoples. They are, as we see later in his classification, lumped in the category of "New Peoples," "emerging from the conjunction, deculturation, and amalgamation of African, European, and indigenous ethnic stocks" (83). As classifications go, this one is also reductionist, of course. But suppose we ask why the descendants of African Blacks have not been considered "testimonial peoples" in America. After all, they also are "modern survivals of the traumatizing actions of (European expansion)," and even a superficial look at the American racial and cultural panorama of the present reveals a strong Black heritage. We can say that Ribeiro's categorization of testimonial peoples does not work for Blacks; it refers only to those who were massively displaced from their original territories. It seems that Ribeiro does not acknowledge the strong presence of African art and culture throughout the Americas because he chooses not to see them.

Ribeiro's discourse participates in another possibility, which is suggested by Carlos Rangel, in another context. Rangel is discussing the European construction of the myth of the native American "noble savage." In a footnote, he asks why Europeans did not encounter the noble savage in Africa. His answer is:

> Quite certainly because the African savages had been known since antiquity and were not, therefore, truly exotic. **Europe found no noble savages in Africa because it was not seeking them there**. And this is why the blacks were perceived by Western consciousness simply as savages—without qualification, in the exact, pejorative meaning of the word. (93, emphasis added)

Of course, the requirement that the "noble savage" be truly exotic, together with the fact that Europeans were not looking for him in Africa, does not alone explain why the Indian became "noble." As many authors have pointed out, Columbus's initial belief that he had found paradise helped begin the myth. However, since the need to conquer and obtain gold at any cost soon dispelled the notion of the Indian's "natural goodness"[3] and gave origin to the massacres which constituted "the greatest genocide in human history" (Todorov 5), it is remarkable that such myth was reborn later.[4]

The issue, then, between the natural goodness of the Indian, and the, as it were, natural propensity of Blacks to be enslaved, was basically resolved by the time Europe started its expansion in the sixteenth century. Because they had been routinely enslaved, the Blacks of Africa could not claim any of what Ribeiro calls "high autonomous **civilization**": the existence of such a thing would have at least hindered their being taken as slaves in the first place. The need to disacknowledge Black civilization, and the consequent result of placing Blacks in a category other than human, led to the denial of their humanity and the affirmation of their "natural enslavability." As slaves, Blacks were denied their native language and forced to learn the captors' language.[5]

I believe that the almost exclusive interest in testimonials by people of Indian origin derives from the dismissal, or denial, of the possibility of a specific Black culture. It seems that Blacks, their culture, their struggles to maintain their culture, cannot count in any way other than the "folkloric." Because Blacks in South America generally, and Brazil specifically, have for so long not been accorded the freedom to express the total wealth of their cultural identity, they are almost forced into a position of bourgeois individualism as over against a larger culture, as if to embody, in their personal struggles, the struggle of a whole race to keep itself true to its roots. In this sense, the form of *testimonio*, as it has been commonly understood, does not fit the Black experience.

What is *testimonio*, then? If it is accorded the honor of being a form which opens a space—or which is the space—for those who bear testimony, it should be available to whoever needs a space to speak and represent the struggles of a people; it should be available to all. As we shall see in a brief study of the form of *testimonio*, such is absolutely not the case.

## I

In an essay in English, now considered a classic on the study of *testimonio*, John Beverley states that, as the bourgeoisie, in the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism, produced "a series of literary forms like the essay, the short story of the *novela ejemplar*, the picaresque novel,

the various kinds of Petrarcan lyric including the sonnet, the autobiography , and the secular theater," our age—also one of transition or "potential for transition from one mode of production to another"—is experiencing the emergence of new forms of cultural and literary expression "that embody, in more or less thematically explicit and formally articulated ways, the social forces contending for power in the world today" (12). One of these forms, according to Beverley, is the *testimonio*. Although acknowledging the potentially repressive danger of so doing, Beverley gives a short history of the *testimonio*, places its more recent origin in the 1960's and its further developments in the need for a "resistance literature" closely related to the "movements for national liberation and the generalized cultural radicalism of that decade" (13). As form, Beverley says that the *testimonio* "may include, but is not subsumed under, any of the following textual categories. . ." autobiography, autobiographical novel, oral history, *novela-testimonio*, nonfiction novel, or 'factographic literature'" (13).

In one very useful study about *testimonio*, Margareth Randall distinguishes it from other genres by its

> ...use of direct sources; the delivery of a history not through the generalizations which characterize the conventional texts, but through the particularities of the voice or voices of the protagonist people; the immediacy (an informer relates an episode he/she has lived, a survivor passes on to us an experience that nobody else can offer, etc.); the use of secondary material (an introduction, other interviews, documents, graphic material, chronologies and additional materials which help make up a living picture); and a high aesthetic quality." (22–3, my translation)

Further in her essay, Randall enters her recipe for anybody who wants to work with *testimonio*, by saying that he/she has to have a profound knowledge of the ideology of the proletariat, prepare a detailed questionnaire with meaningful questions, take a notebook where things related to the interview will be written down, have knowledge of technical apparatuses such as a tape-recorder, and transcribe the oral testimony in two copies. An imperative point, according to Randall, is to have the help of somebody who speaks the language or the informer, in order to avoid wrong interpretations. Randall's admonition is triggered by the (bad) example given by Oscar Lewis, who wrote *Los hijos de Sanchez* (about five Mexican families), *Pedro Martinez* (about a Puerto Rican man), and *Cuatro*

*hombres y Cuatro mujeres* (about Cuba). According to Randall, even though Lewis was a good writer, used detailed techniques, and had access to funds which allowed him to use a great number of technical apparatuses, his books do not reflect "la verdadera historia" because he started by choosing his informers according to preconceived ideas about what he believed interesting (25).

The clearest detail in Randall's recipe is the demand that the *testimonio* be always collected, organized and transcribed by somebody outside the testimonial group. The decisions as to which parts will preserve the unity of the final text are always consigned to the person collecting the testimony. Randall simply infers that any group or person about whom a testimony is written will have their interests served best by somebody who has a deep knowledge of the history of the proletariat struggle. As a whole, the project will consist then in the attempt to right the wrongs done to the proletariat as a group. The person who speaks, even if he/she speaks from his/her own personal experience, will have his/her individual history elided under the ultimate good for the group he/she comes from. The individual can only be accorded the dignity of speaking the truth if he/she speaks from inside a group, as part of this group. No other way is possible for the testimony; mere personal histories are meaningless or, what is worse, "bourgeois." Furthermore, Randall seems to be suggesting that if a collector of a testimonial is knowledgeable about the proletariat's struggle, this knowledge will function as a guarantee that he/she will take no preconceived ideas to the interviews, and that he/she will not choose a witness just because his/her ideas will be interesting and fitting to a preestablished agenda.

What Randall seems to take for granted, in her study of the *testimonio*, is a kind of socially homogenized individual/witness who is not at odds with his/her society as far as his/her positioning is concerned. What Randall assumes is a sexless, classless (within the group) individual, who speaks the truth of the group as if it could be abstracted from the arena of ideological construction.

Yet Domitila, Rigoberta and Carolina are women, and the fact of their gender and of how it is constituted is of utmost importance both as an underlying reality to the experiences they narrate and as an explanation for the reception and categorization of their books as cultural artifacts. When John Beverley in another authoritative account, mentions that the older literary forms such as the novel and the short story originated in a time of transition from a feudalist to a capitalist mode of production, he is not interested in discussing the fact that these forms depicted a specific kind of social arrangement in which the binary oppositions male/female, and public/domestic realms were placed in a symbolic economy where the woman was assigned a role outside the means of production and "ele-

vated" to the role of nurturer, keeper of the domestic fire and of morality.[6] This choice of his originates, perhaps, in his decision to see the *testimonio* as a cultural phenomenon linked basically to matters of national identity and preservation of a culture under siege from outside (capitalist) forces.

But this totalizing view of a culture, although liberating in terms of the need for the protection of the group against violent outside forces, is highly reductive in terms of individual differences and realities. Similarly, Randall, in her explanation of how a *testimonio* is made, literally takes for granted the will to truth and the unquestionability of the representativity of the individual/s to be interviewed for the *testimonio*. Not surprisingly, the class and gender of the interviewees also do not play any part in her concerns; rather, for her, what matters is, most importantly, that these individuals be "contacted" by somebody who has a profound knowledge of the proletariat struggle. It is as if, in Randall's essay, the interviewed individuals are always already in the position of struggling victims of a capitalist society which denies them their rightful dues in this society. Other personal traits do not matter.

In sum, for both Beverley and Randall, the welfare of the group is foremost in the roots of *testimonio*. No wonder Randall excludes the biography and the auto-biography from the *testimonio* form: the individual, his/her private life, has to be looked upon suspiciously, because individuality is, itself, a bourgeois construct. The *testimonio* is, and can only be, for both Beverley and Randall, the history of a group, in which the individual can only function as a mouth who can transmit the truth their eyes have seen. Other parts of the body are not involved, as long as the color of the skin is the right one. The current definitions of *testimonio* do not and cannot present it as a liberating device. Precisely because of the privileging of some testimonial subjects to the detriment of others, the form has ceased to be an instrument of liberation and has become a political straightjacket.

## II

If we analyze the personal history of Carolina, Domitila and Rigoberta, we see that they fit into a symbolic economy which places the woman under either of two fixed, or separate, categories: a) a woman in the household, under the protection and surveillance of a man, and b) a fallen, loose woman, who by definition is outside the established domestic space, and therefore becomes a "public woman." In this part of my analysis, I want to investigate the process through which two of these women—Domitila (wife and mother) and Rigoberta (daughter)—at once seem to renounce the specificity of their gender as **women**, and assume the position of somebody who can express all their communities' histories, failures and victories. I want also to reflect on the factors which led

the other woman, Carolina (single mother), to be seen as a woman speaking exclusively as a (female) Black individual.

Domitila and Rigoberta, even though they both hold jobs outside the home at one time or another in their lives, basically report the financial gains to the head of the household, husband and father respectively. That is, their function outside the home is occasional. It is in the home, as figures of nurturance, that they have their main role. It is no wonder that recently, in Mexico, Rigoberta Menchú's assistant reported that "she'd much rather have her father back than the Nobel Peace Prize" (*People* 88): her situation as a woman located outside the familial economy does not please her. Since she has vowed to never marry, she is left with the uncomfortable situation of a disenfranchised woman; hence, she surrounds herself with peasants and refugees from her country and assumes a maternal role, both giving and obtaining comfort from her countrypeople. Domitila, during the time she gave her testimony to Moema Viezzer, was outside her home; nevertheless she was in Mexico as a representative of the "Housewives' Committee of Siglo XX," an organization of the wives of workers in her hometown. That is to say, even away from home, her primary role as a member of a home, of a "committee of homes," was her identification card.

In keeping with the traditional roles assigned to women—nurturing, selflessness, devotion to the family or immediate society—both Domitila and Rigoberta are portrayed as those who speak not as gendered female beings, but as sexless voices whose main aim is to bring about the ultimate good of the group they represent. In the opening page of *Let me Speak!* Domitila says,

> I don't want anyone at any moment to interpret the story I'm about to tell as something that is only personal. Because I think that my life is related to my people. What happened to me could have happened to hundreds of people in my country. I want to make this clear, because I recognize that there have been people who have done much more than I for the people, but who . . . haven't had the opportunity to be known. (15)

In the opening page of *I... Rigoberta Menchú*, we see exactly the same sentiment. Rigoberta says "I'd like to stress that it's not only my life, it's also the testimony of my people. . . what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people" (1).

The narrating mode of Carolina Maria's book, in contrast with Domitila's and Rigoberta's, is strikingly different: she starts by recording

a perfectly domestic affair, her daughter's birthday. The problem, she immediately states, is that she is not able to buy her child a pair of shoes because, she says, "we are slaves to the cost of living" (17). Other differences follow: unlike Domitila's and Rigoberta's accounts, Carolina's is written by herself, in diary form. She makes comments on the situation of the immediate place where she lives, a slum around São Paulo, and on the overall situation of Brazil. Carolina does not, at any moment, state that she is speaking for her people, for a people, for any people.

Not only does it fit Ribeiro's previously discussed categorization to have Domitila's and Rigoberta's books considered as *testimonios*, but also Carolina's book cannot be easily accorded the title of a *testimonio* because she is a woman speaking outside a "civilization," without a **recognized** tradition which can accommodate the voice of a **Black** woman. Carolina is a Black woman in a country where Blacks, even more than a century after the official freedom of the slaves, still are considered second-class citizens and denied jobs on the basis of their race. Moreover, as a woman alone, she is also speaking from outside a familial, social, and economic tradition: she has no husband, no stable job, and, unlike Domitila and Rigoberta, she has no traditional community to go back to and about which to speak.

Carolina also has to deal with the specificity of her gender and her class. Because she has no family, she is the sole provider for her children and the sole arbiter of her decisions. Even though she is the one whose work buys food and clothes for the children, and she's the one who decides that drinking would denigrate her, hers are "individual" choices, and therefore she cannot be accorded the enunciative position of a member of a Black tradition where such things are known to be praised. Carolina, as well as other Blacks in Brazil, cannot claim as clear an African heritage as the Indians can claim a Quiché, or Aymara, or Guarani, or Inca heritage. Or, maybe, the only Africanness Carolina can claim—besides the one written on her skin color—is her individual will to endure, and to persevere, even when all odds are against her and even if she has no clear family or cultural identity to call her own.

## III

The question at this point is: how can we explain Carolina's work? How can we understand her differences from and similarities to both Domitila and Rigoberta? The mention of a family affair, or a child's birthday, followed by the mention of their slavery in terms of a wider context such as the cost of living, at once implicate Carolina and her small family in an economy which goes beyond her and her slum: she immediately places herself as a citizen of a community in which it is possible for a mother not to be able to buy food and clothes for her children. Carolina is

a single mother. Each one of her children has a different father. Carolina does not have any help, either from a public welfare system or from the children's fathers. Because she has such young children, who need to be cared for, she cannot hold a job which would require regular hours. In addition, Carolina has had only two years of schooling. And finally, Carolina is black. The solution, for her, is to make a living picking up paper and scrap metal on the streets and later selling them to junkyards.

For Carolina, the struggle for survival is made even more difficult because she has to safeguard her shack against the attacks of neighbors, men, women and children, who can easily transform her and her children into scapegoats. These attempts are recorded in her diary, as if in a crescendo: "the terrible neighbors I have won't leave my children alone," (18) "when I return to the favela there is always something new. Maybe Dona Rosa or . . . Mary Angel fought with my children" (18), "Dona Rosa, as soon as she saw my boy José Carlos, started to fight with him" (20), "Dona Cecília appeared. She came to punish my children" (20). Carolina's days are long and hard; she has to carry as much as forty pounds of paper and scraps so that she can make some few *cruzeiros*, buy the basic necessities and feed the children. When she is at work, she still worries about her children, because she is afraid that "those human beasts [in the slum] are capable of invading my shack and mistreating my children. . . .they wait for me to leave so they can come to my shack and hurt my children. . . .When the children are alone they can't defend themselves" (24).

The neighbors' attacks escalate until one day a woman accuses Carolina's 10 year old son of raping her daughter. The boy denies it. But Carolina considers, nevertheless, interning him in the state-run children's correctional facility. She was discouraged by a judge who told her that there the boy would become a criminal. This fact, she later records in her diary, is confirmed by two young boys who escaped from the facility and took shelter in her house, and by a group of young, illiterate, venereal disease ridden young prostitutes who were raised in that place and now infest the city streets.

If we compare the immediate communities both Domitila and Rigoberta come from to the community—the slum—where Carolina lives, the contrast could not be more garish. Domitila and Rigoberta both belong to established families, where each member has a position and is accorded the dignity of that position: Domitila is a mother and a wife, Rigoberta is a daughter assigned a specific *Nahual*, a protective spirit which will go through life with her (18). Both assert that they learned their ways in the tradition of their communities, both find consolation and strength in this tradition. For them, the national societies surrounding their communities carry the meaning of evil, of impending destruction;

therefore, they cling to their inner communal identity at the same time they bypass their national societies and speak, in a language other than their maternal one, to "Europe"—or an international audience—through their testimonies.

In contrast, the community where Carolina lives is shot through by regionalism, and these regional origins are sometimes the reasons for fights. There, poverty, disease, and drunkenness conjugate to make most people almost completely void of the minimal spirit of solidarity. Bahianos fight with Pernambucanos, Italians steal from Brazilians, Portuguese are not to be trusted. Carolina cannot have peace; some neighbors clearly single her and her children out; her situation as a single mother leaves her defenseless against them. However, in spite of the seemingly endless hostility, Carolina has reserves of pity and charity for her neighbors: she lends money and gives food to those who are less fortunate than she is. Other times, although she desperately needs the paper she collects from "her" streets, she understands that another person, a man, has the right to run the same streets and collect what he finds.

So, Carolina does not have any outside means of protection. She cannot count on the children's fathers; she cannot count on her neighbors, and, finally, she cannot count on the state. The occasional help she and the other *favelados* get comes from some religious organizations, but they come with a price: the people have to sit through their indoctrinations, hear them say that the favelados should be humble.[7]

Throughout her account, Carolina is conscious of the political complexities of the wider society beyond her slum and her streets. Even though she has had only a minimal formal education, she is aware of the situation of Blacks in Brazil, the specific lot of women, and of the political successes of the country. Of course her awareness is deeply connected with the gap between the ones who govern and the ones who are governed. Once, relating the ordeal of the poor waiting in line to get some broken crackers from a factory owner, she comments that when they got the crackers, the poor were as happy as "Queen Elizabeth of England when she received the 13 millions in jewels that President Kubitschek sent her as a birthday present" (59). Later, upon noticing how a mailman she knows looks shabby and hungry, she says that President Kubitschek, "who likes pomp, should give his mailmen other uniforms" (72).

## IV

The fact of the written word is another point of contrast between Carolina and the other two women. Because Carolina **wrote** her diaries, she immediately participates in a wider society whose national (and only) language is the same Carolina uses. When we compare the immediate surroundings in which Carolina's, Domitila's and Rigoberta's books were

created, we can see that one of the basic differences is the degree of linguistic and spatial distancing the authors had of their communities. Both Domitila and Rigoberta gave their *testimonios* in Spanish, away from their community, in oral form, and these *testimonios* were later edited and rearranged, according to the female editors, to give them chronological order. Carolina's book, on the other hand, was presented to the editor—the male journalist Audálio Dantas—as a written artifact. Even though in Carolina's case the editor "cleaned" the text of repetitions, he kept most of it, including the mixed up verbs, which sometimes appear in the present, and sometimes in the past tense. Apart from the fact of the inescapable interference of the three editors in the texts—one a male journalist, the others female social scientists—we have to take in consideration that Carolina, because she wrote almost daily, did not have the distancing from her community the other two had. For her, the slum was not, to borrow Benedict Anderson's formulation, an "imagined community." She was too close to it; she had to represent it not as an abstraction, but as a cumulation of individuals whose relationship to her and among themselves was less than ideal. Even though Carolina is aware of her blackness, her difference, the issue is not so much one of ethnic identification; rather, it is the situation of the single individual—herself—and of her "nuclear family," which is at stake.[8] It is not that she is not conscious of the problems she shares with some of her neighbors, all as miserable as she is. The problem, here, is that because she does not have the cushioning of a strong communitary tradition, she tends to write as a self—herself—and not as a voice of the community. At the same time, the nation does not have a space for her—a poor, barely literate, Black single mother—to speak.

Carolina's drama of writing, at once a liberating and an antagonizing device, sets her apart from her community, and is made even more poignant because she has to collect the material—the notebooks in which she writes—literally from the garbage of the larger society. Rigoberta and Domitila go outside their country to speak a language not readily available to all their countrymen, whereas Carolina, although she does not go outside Brazil, sets herself apart from her neighbors by using a device, writing, viewed with suspicion by them. For Carolina, the target audience is not primarily an international arena; rather, it is the country, Brazil. Only it is a Brazil which, she believes, holds the power to address and correct the evils of the favela in general, and to give her the means to protect her family, her most immediate community, from a hostile environment.

In her book, the evil people have proper names, not titles such as, in Domitila's book, "a manager," or "the company," and, in Rigoberta's

book, "ladinos," or "Military Commissioner." This explains why, once the book was published, Carolina's neighbors revolted against her and even stoned the truck which was taking her belongings to her new house (5).[9] Carolina's book can be seen as a rejection of what Jameson calls a dimension of "utopian gratification" (288). She knows that the relationship the nation can have with the favela is not simply one of oppression. That of course explains why, first of all, she writes for the Brazilian nation, and second, why she uses the institutionalized forces of the country—the police, the press—both to restore order to the slum and to serve as audience for her book.[10] There has to be, for her, a degree of trust in the national institutions which neither Rigoberta nor Domitila would share. On the other hand, because Carolina displays a certain degree of familiarity with the workings of the national entity, she can criticize it, make comments about its history (slavery, cost of living), and address historical figures as human agencies (comments on Kubitschek's present to the queen of England, or on his difficult name, for instance).[11] Rigoberta and Domitila, because they address an international audience, need on the one hand, to assume this audience's good will and power over their respective national societies, and on the other hand, to reduce these national societies to faceless institutions bent on destroying their respective communities.

Maybe, for Carolina, the issue of her blackness is resolved as a will to endure, not as a member of an ethnic group, since she hardly felt she belonged to any group at all.[12] Carolina is but an individual whose blackness can function as a sign of difference and of singularity. As a member of a group, or a race, continuously threatened into silence through slavery, joblessness, and oppression, Carolina does not rely on an idealized concept of kinship, tradition and community. Her body, a black one, is all she owns; her voice, a woman's voice, is what she can use to represent her plight and that of her children. As an organic intellectual, she speaks from the space of the people: not all the people, not even all the Black people nor of all the *favela* people. Rather, she speaks as a specific kind of individual whose voice, because so idiosyncratic, so problematic, can function as a way for those of us, outsiders, to begin to apprehend the complexities both of the subject Carolina and of other women who live at the margins of capitalist society.

In other words, Carolina's story, as well as her example, cannot be taken as paradigmatic of all women of Brazil, much less of all women in America, but it can illuminate the way in the search for the much needed understanding of the real conditions under which marginal people live. Her account, although formally not a *testimonio*, nevertheless bears witness to a life of struggle for survival and preservation of human dignity. As it has come to be understood, *testimonio* keeps the margins in place,

reconstructs them, so that the center—"Europe," an international society, intellectuals—can pick and choose which margins will be allowed to speak at certain moments, so that some political agendas can be legitimized. For this new form to have the claim of being a liberating weapon, it needs to open itself to the accounts of persons whose stories, like Carolina's, do not agree with a pre-established recipe.

## NOTES

[1] Carlos Vogt argues that Carolina did not die in poverty. Rather, she "died sad, abandoned and misunderstood." Between the years of 1961, when she obtained a delirious success with *Quarto de Despejo*, and 1977, when she died in her small farm, she was seen in 1966 back on the streets, picking paper again, as she was doing at the time she wrote *Quarto de Despejo*. Her literary ambitions, however, continued during all this time: she also wrote the diaries *Casa de Alvenaria, Provérbios e Pedaços de Fome, Um Brasil para brasileiros*, and the novels *Felizarda* and *Os escravos*) ("Trabalho, pobreza e trabalho intellectual" 206). Her last book, *Diário de Bitita*, was published after her death in 1977.

[2] In the context of testimonials, I have never seen even one mention of Native Americans of the United States.

[3] It is remarkable that even Bartolomé de las Casas, ferocious defender of the Indians, did not extend his sympathy to Blacks. Todorov says that Las Casas "did not have the same attitude toward Indians and Blacks: he consents that the latter, not the former, be reduced to slavery" (170). As Todorov points out, although las Casas writes in his *History of the Indies* that he considered the slavery of both groups unjust and tyrannical, as late as 1544 "he still possessed a black slave" (170).

[4] When, in the late 1700's, the struggles for liberation from the mother countries started in Latin America, political elites needed to differentiate themselves from the European model. "Honorary Indians" sprang up from every elite group in Latin America. At the same time, this same elite was oblivious to the actual living conditions of the real Indians. Even though Blacks constituted a large part of the population in many Latin American countries, no one ever claimed the honor of being an "Honorary Black." The stain of slavery was by then deeply rooted and associated with Blacks, precisely because they had been taken as slaves for such a long time even before America was discovered.

[5] The importance of language cannot be overemphasized. In "The Order of Discourse," for instance, Foucault remarks that in appearance speech

may well be of little account; however, he says, "the prohibitions that surround it very soon reveal its links with desire and with power. There is nothing surprising about that, since, as psychoanalysis has shown, discourse is not simply that which manifests (or hides) desire—it is also the object of desire; and since, as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not merely that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized" (110). Carolina, of course, did not read (certainly never even heard of) Foucault. But she expresses the same understanding of the power of language when she says "I don't have any physical force but my words hurt more than a sword. And the wounds don't heal" (*Child of the Dark* 49).

[6] I owe part of this discussion to my readings of Mary Poovey's *Uneven Developments; The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Even though I am aware that the specific texts and society Poovey discusses in this book cannot be automatically translated *ipsis litteris* either into the texts produced by Carolina, Domitila and Rigoberta, or into the societies they come from, I believe that, because both Latin America and England stem from a common Western Culture, Poovey's lucid discussion of how such gender roles were ideologically constructed in the mid-nineteenth century can be useful for the understanding of how they were established in Latin America.

[7] At one point, Carolina comments about a religious person who comes to the slum to offer food and advice: "If Brother Luiz was married, had children, and earned the minimum wage, I would like to see if he would be so humble. He said that God blesses only those who suffer with resignation. If the Brother saw his children eating rotten food already attacked by vultures and rats, he would stop talking about resignation and rebel, because rebellion comes from bitterness" (78). Rigoberta Menchú, on the other hand, in her childhood dreamed about learning Spanish so that she could preach to her neighbors. A mature Menchú, however, comments that the religious people draw false impressions of the Indian world and do not understand nor respect the Indian traditions (9). Of course, Rigoberta's community has an "organic" religion from which to draw inspiration and a view of the world; hers is a life embedded in Indian traditions. For Carolina, however, the only organized religion available is Christianity.

[8] In Carolina's book, these four people—herself, her two sons and her daughter—are, to a certain extent, what Rigoberta's Quiché Indians and Domitila's Bolivian miners are in theirs: a community cornered and threatened by the outside world, which tries to destroy its internal coherence and tradition. Like the miners of Bolivia or the Quiché Indians

of Guatemala, Carolina and her children are in danger of arrest, deprivation and death all the time. The other two women's accounts deserve to be registered: Domitila, even pregnant, was arrested and, while in prison, was tortured and lost her child (*Let me Speak!* 120–55); Rigoberta's brother was burned alive in front of the community (*I. . . Rigoberta Menchú* 172–82), her mother was kidnapped, raped, tortured and left to die tied to a tree (193–200), and her father was killed during the occupation of the Spanish embassy (183–7). These episodes are truly horrible, because so dramatic and violent. However, Carolina's constant fear of starvation, beatings from her neighbors, and imprisonment of her son, participates in the same economy of horrors inflicted on those who have no power and no protection.

[9] Because Carolina does not have a traditional community such as the miners or the Indians to draw strength from, her immediate community is composed by her three children. Just as the Bolivian miners and the Quiché Indians do not oppose Domitila and Rigoberta, Carolina's children also do not oppose her. The opposing and threatening communities, are, respectively, Bolivian society, Guatemalan society, and the slum dwellers. From these the three women can expect harm, harassment, and death. What their work is trying to do is to reach out, above and beyond this ring of opposition, and touch a society outside: the international community in the case of Domitila and Rigoberta, and the larger Brazilian society in Carolina's case.

[10] Of course, Carolina is aware of a larger, international society beyond Brazil. In January 19, 1959, she receives the rejected manuscripts of the novels she sent to *Reader's Digest* in the United States. Since she does not possess a typewriter, one can well imagine that *Reader's Digest* did not even read her handwritten work. Furthermore, throughout the text, she does not seem aware that in the U.S. people speak a language other than Portuguese. What she does register, however, is the universal pain of rejection: "The worst slap for those who write is the return of their books" (131).

[11] It is interesting to observe that extreme poverty does not prevent her from reading newspapers: they are easily available, hanging in the newsstands. This access is only possible because, unlike Domitila and Rigoberta, Carolina lives in a big city in a country in which everybody speaks the same language. Because of this set of circumstances, Carolina is capable of obtaining almost immediate information about the whole country, whereas the other two women, even though they are extremely active in their communities and interested in political issues, do not have the same quick access to general information about their respective countries.

[12] This is not to say that Blacks have never struggled to keep their identity and sense of culture throughout Brazilian history. On the contrary, as early as the sixteenth century, Black brotherhoods flourished in Brazil, under the auspices of the Church. On other occasions, even before the official freedom of the slaves, Black and Mulatto movements, some with their own newspapers, appeared in Brazil. Thomas Skidmore remarks, however, that "the study and preservation of Afro-Brazilian contribution to Brazilian culture and national character. . . has been politically safe[:] it fits perfectly with the elite view that Brazil's links to Africa are now essentially quaint" ("Race and Class in Brazil: Historical Perspectives" 110) For more details on the Black movements in Brazil, see A. J. R. Russell-Wood, "Black and Mulatto Brotherhoods in Colonial Brazil," and Thomas Skidmore, *Black into White, Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought*.

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# LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN'S VOICES: LA MALINCHE TO RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ

*Ana Maria Romo de Mease*

Women in Latin America have always been active participants in their societies and have had important roles in shaping their countries' identities: fighting in political struggles and expressing their uniqueness and individuality through art and literature. Women have been ignored or have passed unnoticed many times because of the few opportunities for them to be in the public eye. Other times they were overlooked by the historians, the majority of whom were males. From the conquest to the present, Latin American women have played crucial and significant roles in their societies.

Among the most prominent and renowned women in Latin American history, literature and art are La Malinche, an Indian woman whose role at the time of the conquest had a great impact on the formation of Mexico's character; Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a Mexican nun who is considered the greatest poet of colonial Latin America; Gabriela Mistral, a Chilean poet and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1945; and Frida Kahlo, a Mexican painter in the first half of the twentieth Century, whose art has become internationally famous (Rosenberg, Kincaid, and Logan 174).

Latin American women have also attained prominent political positions in their countries. Eva Perón, the wife of President Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina, had an enormous impact on the poor of her country. She was a bridge between the workers and the President, revered before and after her death in 1952. Violeta Chamorro, in Nicaragua, has been the President of her country since 1990 (174).

Powerful women in politics, literature and art are not the only ones with influence in their societies. Women such as the Mexicans Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez and Gertrudis Bocanegra have fought for freedom side by side with men during independence movements. "Las soldaderas," women soldiers, participated in the Mexican Revolution of 1910. At present, Latin American women have become community leaders, social protesters, and feminists who demand their civil rights and social justice. Rigoberta Menchú is one of these women, a Guatemalan Indian with a great sense of justice who is struggling for the recognition of her people and Maya culture.

These Latin American women are feminine voices trying to express and interpret in their own personal way, in the context of their unique circumstances, the country they belong to, and the time and world in which they live.

In this paper I want to focus on four unique, prominent women who have forged their lives in different ways and have left an unforgettable legacy in their countries and societies: La Malinche, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Gabriela Mistral, and Rigoberta Menchú. I have selected these women because they represent different epochs and times, diverse social and ethnic backgrounds, and different countries and origins. However, they are connected and related to one another because they are strong feminine figures who stand out alone, whose roles left a mark on their countries' histories. They are modern women whose education sets precedents and allows them to influence their societies. Sor Juana is considered a feminist and the best poet in colonial Latin America, and Mistral was the first Latin American writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. I have chosen to start, however, with a XVI Century Indian woman, La Malinche, and end with a contemporary Indian woman, Rigoberta Menchú, to point out the circle that Latin America has to go through in order to find itself and survive. Amazingly, these two women, separated by four centuries, are connected by their modern thought. With their words, they both play an active role in history: one as an interpreter and advisor, the other as an activist in defense of her people.

**La Malinche**

Beginning in 1492, the European conquest of the New World greatly altered the lives of indigenous women. In their culture, indigenous women were treated more equitably and fairly than Iberian women, but during the conquest the conquerors took women as spoils of victory. They exploited women, using them as servants, caretakers, and for sexual satisfaction (Rosenberg, Kincaid, Logan 175). One such woman whose life and role in the conquest was vital is "La Malinche," or Doña Marina as she was christened, an indigenous woman who was given to Hernán Cortés with twenty other women by a Tabascan tribe. "She became one of Cortés's most trusted counselors, and later his mistress, mother of one of his children, [Martín Cortés]" (Franco 131). La Malinche was invaluable to Hernán Cortés as an interpreter. She was an Aztec woman who, as a child, was sold as a slave by her parents to the tribe from Tabasco. She learned the Maya language from the Tabascans and spoke the Nahua of her ancestors. La Malinche was instrumental not only in interpreting but also in informing Cortés about the Indian mentality and governmental system. She advised him on the Aztec empire, its capital, Tenochtitlan, and the organization of vassal cities and subject tribes (Kandell 96–97). Without the guidance of La Malinche, some scholars suggest, the conquest would have been impossible. Some have said that she became the most disliked person in the Americas. She was the image of great and

unusual power for the indigenous people, and for the Spanish conquerors she represented the model convert.

However, many years later, when Mexico obtained its independence from Spain and the search for a national identity arose, La Malinche's role in the conquest was seen and identified as a symbol of the betrayal and humiliation of her people, an act that facilitated the exploitation and harsh treatment of the Indians by the Spaniards (Franco 131). Thus, the problem of identity for the Mexican springs from La Malinche's relationship with Hernán Cortés. She had a son with him, Martín Cortés, a son that was illegitimate since Cortés never married "Doña Marina." Martín Cortés was a bastard who inherited a meager annual pension when his father died. This was the beginning of a new hybrid race that has been at odds with its origin ever since.

La Malinche is also a symbol of surrender and loss. Octavio Paz in his famous essay, *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950), analyzes the Mexican character and equates the conquest to a violation and rape, not only in a historical sense but also of the Indian women. The surrender of La Malinche and her violation by Cortés, even if she consented, and the way she was used by him to achieve his goals represent "a las indias fascinadas, violadas o seducidas por los españoles.... [La Malinche] encarna lo abierto, lo chingado, frente a nuestros indios, estoicos, impasibles y cerrados" ( the Indian women who were fascinated, raped, or seduced by the Spanish conquerors... La Malinche embodies the wound, the open, the raped, as opposed to our stoic, impassive, and hermetic Indians.") (Paz 94). La Malinche, therefore, is the traitor who was open to foreign ways. She willingly cooperated with the strangers and allowed them to use her. When she was no longer needed, she was abandoned and forgotten. This openness of La Malinche stands in opposition to the stoicism and imperviousness of the Indians. From this experience, the name "Malinche" was transformed into a pejorative adjective, "Malinchista," used to denounce any Mexican who is open to foreigners and is interested in seeing Mexico open to other countries, to the exterior (94–95).

Paz sees La Malinche and Hernán Cortés as something more than mere historical figures. They signify the conflict of the Mexican birth, the beginning of the mestizo race, born from the mixture of Indian and Spanish blood, a conflict that Mexicans have not been able to resolve yet. With the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, starting in January 1994, this problem of identity has been brought to light again. Who are the Mexicans? What is our identity? Are we Indians, Spaniards, Mestizos, Criollos?

The famous Mexican painter and muralist, José Clemente Orozco, depicted La Malinche in one of his murals at the National Preparatory School as the Mexican Eve: the mother of modern Mexico. Octavio Paz

says that Mexicans reject this Indian origin and past, that they do not recognize themselves as Indians or Spaniards; they are only human beings. They do not have ancestors, he suggests: they are orphans. "El mexicano rompe sus ligas con el pasado, reniega de su origen y se adentra solo en la vida histórica" ("The Mexican breaks his ties with the past, denies his origin and walks into his historical life alone.") (95).

The prominent Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes says that the answer to this conflict must be the Mexicans' own. They must decide if they are interested in participating in the fruits of the Indigenous cultures, accepting their value. They have to decide whether to respect Indian values, not abandoning them but rather salvaging them from injustice. Carlos Fuentes says: "Los indios de México son parte de nuestra comunidad policultural y multirracial. Olvidarlos es condenarnos al olvido a nosotros mismos" ("The Indians of Mexico are part of our policultural and multiracial community. To forget our Indians and our origin is to condemn ourselves to oblivion.") (39).

**Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz**

Another prominent woman, whose life, literary works, and times are the subject of many contemporary, profound studies, is Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Juana de Asbaje y Ramírez de Santillana, her lay name, was born in 1648, in San Miguel de Nepantla, a hacienda between Mexico City and the city of Puebla. She was raised at her maternal grandfather's side in his Panoayapán Hacienda. She learned to read and write at age three, and she was so interested in pursuing her education at the university that she was sent to Mexico City when she was eight years old in order to further her education. There, she lived with her Spanish Creole relatives. Her precocious intelligence and wit, her talent in literature and music, and her adolescent beauty attracted the attention of the Vicereine, the Marquees of Mancera, who invited her to be her companion and lady-in-waiting. Juana de Asbaje very soon became a favorite of the Mexican Court (Kandell 222–223).

Late seventeenth century colonial Mexico was a closed aristocratic world—a society of great decadence and virulent misogyny (222). At about age twenty, Juana de Asbaje decided to enter a convent after her experience at court, where she most probably had the opportunity to taste love and deception, the vanity of flattery, and perhaps gossip and criticism about her bastard origin. She left the court where she wrote poetry, dazzled university scholars and discoursed with them on the latest literary currents, or any other ideas or books that arrived from Europe. Juana de Asbaje chose to become Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz and dedicate herself to her studies, to writing poetry, and to her religious vocation. Sor Juana confessed that she was not inclined towards marriage, but in her circum-

stances and times she could only choose between matrimony and religious seclusion. The conventions and formality of the society in which she lived would not allow her to live alone and study exclusively. In 1669, she finally professed at the Jeronymite convent (Millan 82–83).

To understand Sor Juana's personality, one must read "Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz" ("Reply to Sor Philotea"), a letter she sent to the Bishop, Fernandez de Santa Cruz, which is considered one of the best prose works written in Mexico during that period. One must keep in mind that during the seventeenth century women did not have opportunities to educate themselves. Therefore, Sor Juana's position and stand is all the more admirable, because she not only defended women's rights to their own freedom but also showed her intellectual vocation and her capability of creating great works in spite of her limitations as a self-taught individual (84-85). We can hear Sor Juana Inés in her letter to Sor Philotea defending her position towards learning and her pursuit of knowledge: "...What is true...is that from my first glimmers of reason, my inclination to letters was of such power and vehemence, that neither the reprimands of others—and I have received many—nor my own considerations—and there have been not a few of these—have succeeded in making me abandon this natural impulse which God has implanted in me..." (qtd. in Rosenberg 180).

Octavio Paz says that "Respuesta a Sor Filotea" ("Reply to Sor Philotea") is a revealing text. It is, he says, the defense of the right to be an intellectual and a defense of women. It is the story of a religious vocation. Sor Juana writes: "I became a nun because ...I knew that ... it was the least unreasonable and most becoming choice I could make to assure my ardently desired salvation" (qtd. in Rosenberg 180). It is a portrait and also a defense of her avid spirit, always ironic and passionate. Paz continues by saying that her double condition of being a woman and an intellectual made Sor Juana a solitary modern image. She embodies a conflict that is double in nature: that of her own society and epoch, and the one of her femininity. Her "Reply to Sor Philotea," therefore, is a defense of a woman's right to knowledge and learning, making Sor Juana as modern as today's feminists (Paz 125). With great courage and wit, Sor Juana defends her inclination and right to study: "Even if these studies were to be viewed... as to one's credit (as I see they are indeed celebrated in men), none would be due me, since I pursue them involuntarily. If they are seen as reprehensible, for the same reason I do not think I should be blamed..." (qtd. in Rosenberg 181).

In this colonial, narrow-minded, male-dominated society, Sor Juana's spiritual guide, the Jesuit Núñez de Miranda, and the Bishop of Puebla, Fernández de la Santa Cruz, constantly criticized and reprimanded her. They "condemned her verses as profane, and her confessor broke

off all contact" (Kandell 224). Sor Juana tried to defend herself in her poems. She pondered the criticism and tried to understand if it originated because she was a nun or because she was a woman (224). Her poetry became decidedly feminist when the Church locked up prostitutes in a shelter called Belen (225). Sor Juana wrote:

> Which has the greater sin when burned
> by the same lawless fever:
> She who is amorously deceived,
> or he, the sly deceiver?
> Or which deserves the sterner blame,
> though each will be a sinner:
> She who becomes a whore for pay,
> Or he who pays to win her?
>
> (qtd. in Kandell 225)

Sor Juana's major error was her interest in learning and discussing theology. Her persecutors would not tolerate a woman writing on this subject. In her works she "criticizes religious writings as too opaque, too encumbered by obscure citations" (225).

Sor Juana was the center of the viceregal court's attention, and, in spite of her confessor's efforts to make her give up her writing and studies, the Vicereine visited her often and "encouraged her to continue writing poetry" (223). With the help of the Vicereine, Sor Juana's works were published in Spain; but when the Vicereine and her husband left Mexico, Sor Juana lost a powerful protector. The Church continued pressuring her to give up her intellectual life; when many of her friends stopped visiting her, and some of the nuns in the convent rejected her, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz finally surrendered (225).

In *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz says that Sor Juana's experience, which ends in silence and in capitulation, gives us an idea of the colonial times and order. "In Sor Juana's work the Colonial society expresses and reaffirms itself, in her silence that same society condemns itself" (127).

Octavio Paz, in *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las Trampas de la Fe* (*Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz or the Traps of Faith*) (1982), comments:

> Sor Juana was the image of contradiction: she was the perfect and completed expression of her world and at the same time its negation. Sor Juana represented the ideal of her epoch: a genius, a unique case, a singular precedent...She was dreaded: her voice delighted, but her reasons killed...The true Sor Juana was alone, consumed by her thought." (359)

**Gabriela Mistral**

From the distant Seventeenth Century and the poetry of a rebellious Mexican nun, we move to the life and works of Gabriela Mistral (Lucila Godoy Alcayaga), a Chilean woman, poet and educator who was born in 1889 and lived until 1957. She is a prominent member of a group of poets who revolutionized Latin American poetry with their openness and freedom of expression. Her feelings, especially of love, are the themes of her poems, which she expresses in a very original and profoundly personal way.

Gabriela Mistral was very poor. She grew up in a rural area, but her mother tried to give her the best education possible within their humble means. She became an elementary country school teacher and her dedication to education was to be a constant in her life. She went from rural teaching positions in remote villages in Chile to finally become principal of a high school in Santiago, the capital. "The woman that would adopt the name of an angel and the wind: Gabriela Mistral, was bound toward fame" (Foreword, Alone 24).

Alone explains that Gabriela Mistral's experiences and her dedication to education and teaching were beneficial to Chile and many other countries such as Mexico and Cuba. After she published her first book of poetry, *Desolación* (1922), she was invited by José Vasconcelos, the Minister of Education in Mexico, to collaborate with him in restructuring that country's educational programs. The opportunity to work in Mexico and help write and implement many of her creative ideas on education was a welcome change from the hard life teaching in country schools on a meager salary. She blessed and thanked Mexico vehemently. "For the first time in eighteen years I can work in peace, without the economical pressure that unsettles my life constantly. I have praised God, and have blessed with all my heart this foreign land that has given me such a wonderful peace" (qtd. in Foreword 17). She was treated with warmth and respect, and she always talked about her Mexican experiences with fondness and profound gratitude: "Their simple ways of life, their simple and loving manner is a virtue not easy to find in Chileans... [Mexicans] have won my heart!" (Foreword 17).

After residing in Mexico, Gabriela Mistral traveled and wrote constantly. She went to Europe, she lived overseas, and she held several positions in the foreign service of Chile, serving as a consul and working for the League of Nations. In 1938, her second book, *Tala*, was published. Again, as in *Desolación*, love and death are the subject. She is inspired once more by her first love and his tragic end. She overcomes her sadness and sorrow, singing to universal love, to nature, the land and America; she also sings about children and to children (Florit y Jiménez 202). In her

third collection of poems, *Lagar* (1954), Mistral continues her all-encompassing and transcendental love for all. Death appears again, but this time more as an enigma.

Mistral is also one of the Latin American poets who best depicts the landscape of the Americas. She describes it vividly and with intense reality. In her poetry she gives us the opportunity to see through her feelings and eyes the landscape that she loved so much. As she contemplated it, we follow her beings: children playing, singing, holding hands in circles playing "rondas," men toiling, loving, suffering. Gabriela went through the world from North to South, East to West, contemplating and naming things in her poems to keep them alive: "The palm tree of Cuba, the cornfields in Mexico, the wheat in Uruguay, the poppy in California" (205).

Gabriela Mistral is ascetic and primitive, a country woman who inspires great respect. Her simplicity, force, energy and morality are qualities that helped secure for her the Nobel Prize in 1945. The following excerpts from "The Liana" demonstrate the qualities that made hers a unique feminine voice:

> Up the stalk of night
> that you loved, that I love,
> creeps my torn prayer,
> rent and mended, uncertain and sure.
> .....
> and I learn that the patient
> cry, broken, mends;
> climbs again and climbing,
> the more it suffers, the more attains.... (15)

Gabriela Mistral died on January 11, 1957. "This... concludes the story of the poor little girl that dreamed of becoming a queen some day. And she became one" (Alone, Foreword 20, 23). She was a true queen in her educational career and in her consecration as a poet: a unique, modern figure for her times.

**Rigoberta Menchú**

Rigoberta Menchú is another remarkable woman in modern Latin American history whose life and accomplishments are as astounding and significant as the works of her predecessors. She is a contemporary woman, a Quiche Indian from Guatemala, and an activist who has become famous because of her dedication and courage in speaking for her Maya-Quiche people. She became known through her testimonial book on her life, her family, and the Indians in Guatemala and the Americas.

The story of Rigoberta is:

> ...an account of contemporary history...What she tells us of her relationship with nature, life, death and her community has already been said by the Indians of North America, those of Central America and those of South America. The cultural discrimination she has suffered is something that all the continent's Indians have been suffering ever since the Spanish conquest. The voice of Rigoberta Menchú allows the defeated to speak. (Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, Introduction xi)

Menchú's testimony recounts her difficult life as a poor Indian child. Rigoberta is a witness and a voice that has broken the silence. She has lived through the "genocide that destroyed her family and community...She refuses to let us forget" (xi).

In January, 1982, after her father died, burned alive together with other Indian representatives in a massacre at the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala City, Rigoberta was invited to go to Europe to participate in a commission of the 31 January Popular Front to denounce human rights violations. This was an opportunity that turned into a book, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*.

She met Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, a Latin American anthropologist, who convinced Rigoberta to dictate her story. (As Arturo Arias said in his lecture on Guatemalan writers at the NEH Summer Institute, 1995, Rigoberta Menchú's book is a hybrid text since the story is hers and the structure belongs to Elisabeth Burgos-Debray.)

When the book was published in 1983, the Guatemalan government prohibited it because it was considered subversive. In 1988, however, after the dictatorship fell, Rigoberta was "pardoned" by the government, and she became a public figure. Rigoberta can be seen as a mediator and a metaphor in her country. In the international arena she can create the Indian existence, preserve the Indian identity, and denounce terror and punishment. *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is a book that attempts to name all that might have the potential of disappearing. It is testimonial literature that was done by talking and recording, leaving word of what a society, country and community are like. Rigoberta recounts her life and at the same time retells the story of many Guatemalan Indians: their exploitation, hardships, and struggles for a better life.

Rigoberta Menchú chose to fight through her Christian faith. She learned Spanish in order to read the Bible. She became a catechist and used this work as an expression of political protest, rebellion and religious

commitment. She fought, and still fights, for the recognition of indigenous people through an organization called "Vicente Menchú Revolutionary Christians." She says that she chose this organization because as a Christian, it is her duty to educate the Christian "compañeros":

> My life does not belong to me. I've decided to offer it to a cause...I have to teach my people that together we can build the people's Church, a true Church. Not just hierarchy, or a building, but real change inside people. I chose this as my contribution to the people's war. (245)

She says that her cause grew out of "wretchedness and bitterness. It has been radicalized by the poverty in which my people live" (246). She also asserts with great courage, vigor and energy that "My commitment to our struggle recognizes neither boundaries nor limits: only those of us who carry our cause in our hearts are willing to take the risks" (236).

There is no doubt that Rigoberta Menchú is an exceptional woman deeply dedicated to preserving her culture, obtaining recognition for her people and rightfully demanding social justice. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray says that Rigoberta "wants to play an active role in history and it is that which makes her thought so modern" (xiii). "Rigoberta has chosen words as her weapon and I have tried to give her words the permanency of print" (xviii). To conclude, Burgos-Debray dedicates some verses to Menchú from *Barefoot Meditations* by the great Guatemalan author Miguel Ángel Asturias:

> Rise and demand; you are a burning flame.
> You are sure to conquer there where the final horizon
> Becomes a drop of blood, a drop of life,
> Where you will carry the universe on your shoulders,
> Where the universe will bear your hope. (xxi)

Rigoberta Menchú was the winner of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize.

From La Malinche's role in the Conquest of Mexico to Rigoberta Menchú's activism four hundred and seventy years later, Latin American women's presence has been felt—not always making radical changes in their societies but nevertheless participating in different ways and areas of expertise and interest. From the beginning, education has been the key to giving women better opportunities in their societies. During the early twentieth century, Latin American women were able to receive a better education, and through it they have improved their social and legal status. Contemporary women in Latin America continue sharing the traditional responsibilities of raising and caring for their children and manag-

ing their homes. However, they are still separated by the social classes and ethnic groups they belong to (Rosenberg, Kincaid, and Logan 176).

Women from ethnic minorities often experience a dual discrimination based on gender and ethnicity (176). Rigoberta Menchú's book has shown that Latin American women today are becoming more active participants in transforming their societies, and they are "more influential and dynamic in their public participation than at any time in the past" (179).

### Afterward

This paper is an expansion of a unit of study titled "In Women's Hands: The Changing Roles of Women," which is to be taught in an interdisciplinary studies culture course in a community college. The unit's topic, taken from the **Americas Telecourse**, is the point of departure and guide for the students to research, analyze, assess and learn about Latin American women, their roles through the history of their individual countries, and the formation of their societies.

The telecourse unit of study explores women's roles and their increased political awareness and activism in the past forty years. It also focuses on Chilean women's experience, political and social involvement since the Allende government, the Pinochet dictatorship, and the recent return to democracy. To broaden the program, the students will read the corresponding thematic unit in *Americas: An Anthology*, which has readings on women from different countries and backgrounds. To deepen the experience of the students, I selected four women of different epochs, social classes and ethnic origins.

To center the attention of students on a problem that has not yet been resolved in the Americas, especially in countries and regions where Indians constitute either the majority or a large percentage of the population, some questions that the students could try to research and respond to include: How can we integrate indigenous peoples? How can we deal with their needs? How can we solve their demands for social justice?

### Suggested Activities

Drawing from this paper, which will be presented to the class as a lecture, the students could compare the lives and societies of the four women depicted. They could, for example, compare Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, colonial society, and her struggles to those of twentieth century Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral. Other students could do research on La Malinche and have a debate on her role and impact on her country versus the role of Rigoberta Menchú in contemporary Guatemala and Latin America. To help visualize the life of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz in colonial Mexico and better understand her role in that society, we could watch the

movie *"Yo la peor de todos"* (*"I, the Worst of All"*), discuss in depth her "feminist" position, her work, and her silence at the end of her life.

**Assignments and Discussion Questions**

Taking ideas from the suggested assignments in the **Americas Telecourse** and the assigned readings—"Women in Society," Chapter 2, Thomas E. Skidmore and Peter H. Smith: *Modern Latin America* 3rd Ed., 1992, *Americas: An Anthology*, Chapter 7; *I Rigoberta Menchú*—the following questions could be used to generate discussion and essays or term papers:

1. Based on your readings, the lectures and the discussions in class, do you think Latin American women are more or less politically active than women in the United States?
2. Has women's position in the family changed? If yes, how and what are the factors that indicate this change?
3. Another possible writing assignment to conclude the study of this unit could be a summary essay on the lessons that women in the U.S. might obtain from the experiences and lives of women in Latin America.
4. Another movie, "The Official Story," could be used for future discussion of the *"desaparecidos"* (the disappeared) topic. This theme could be further discussed in an essay or term paper which would attempt to answer the question: Who are the disappeared and what is their impact on the activism of Latin American women? This is another idea that I have drawn from the *Americas: Faculty Guide*, (1993).

The study of this unit on the changing roles of women should give students a better understanding of the historical development and participation of Latin American women in their societies as well as an insight into their lives, plights and struggles. I also hope to inspire students to reflect on the cultural norms that keep women from making radical changes in their families and societies and how they have become more politically involved.

As my students come to understand Latin American women, I would like them to feel as the Argentinian poet, Alejandra Pizarnik felt when she described their accomplishments:

> We also have built durable fires
> But mine
> As high as yours and as changing
> Hides behind the hands upon your eyes.
> Their reflection burns.

(The dark reflections
Of other, all-consuming flames.)

(qtd. in Manguel 7)

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# CHINA IN BORGES' "THE GARDEN OF FORKING PATHS"

*Bettye S. Walsh*

"What if they cut all the poplars down?" said Shi Xiu.
"How will we be able to travel?"
"The stumps will still be there, won't they?
Those will be our markers"
(Shi Nai'an and Luo Guanzhong *Outlaws of the Marsh*)

"There is no new thing upon the earth"
(Jorge Luis Borges "El Aleph")

Few writers have attracted the level of critical response received by Argentinean author Jorge Luis Borges. His works have spawned a virtual industry for the interested critic, with good reason. Dense with details, both factual and imaginary, his fiction is crafted by acts of conscious choice, not chance, from a mind that seems to know everything, sometimes even the unknowable. Such a narrative world begs to be explored, examined, explained.

Even the cross-culturalist critic is not to be disappointed by Borges. Arabian, middle and far eastern literary references, as well as Anglo-Saxon allusions, abound in his canon. To select one story for a comparatist reading can be problematic unless one agrees with Murrillo's analysis that *"El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan"* or "Garden of Forking Paths" (1941) is Borges' "first completely successful...unsurpassed effort" (135). This choice further begs analysis for its foreign elements—a classic story framework infused with non-western, in this case Chinese, cultural influences.

The casual reader of Borges quickly identifies his extensive awareness of oriental literature and culture. But, as Paul Ropp, editor of *The Heritage of China*, points out, while Chinese fiction and the fiction of the West may have striking parallels, fundamentally, "Chinese fiction has not had much influence on Western Literature" (310). Such a generalization seems somewhat elitist and may not be accurate for selected works of Borges. In an interview, his mother describes young Borges' affinity for the orient by noting that he was "enthusiastic about Egyptian things...until he threw himself into Chinese literature; he has a lot of books on the subject" (qtd. in Kushigian 39).

On the other hand, Gerald Martin is quick to point out that "a superficial reading of his [Borges'] stories might lead one to think he

admired... Chinese culture as much as European, but let no one believe it; Borges was a classicist and an imperialist" (156). Whether Borges' use of Chinese elements constitutes an imperialist agenda, which Edward Said would describe as "a kind of intellectual authority over the Orient," is not so certain. Questions of degree or amount are often difficult to quantify, but clearly China, or Borges' vision of China, is extant in many of his works.

Edward Said suggests that when writers select exotic oriental details they are exercising a kind of voyeurism in which the writer "renders its [the Orient's] mysteries plain for and to the West. He [the writer] is never concerned with the Orient..." thus creating what V.G. Kiernan calls "Europe's collective day-dream of the Orient" (qtd. in Said *Orientalism* 52). Such use underscores the dominance of one group over an "Other," constituting a paradigm that at its heart purposes nothing more than imperial knowledge production and reduces cultural references to essentialist identifiers.

Borges' canon, however, suggests an imagination more than capable of providing exotic descriptors from outside the pale of reality if voyeuristic "othering" were his goal. Further, Borges is rarely accused of titillating the masses; his ideal narrator presents the facts so that "a few readers—very few—... [see the] banal reality" ("Tlon" 3). He does not pander to a collective day-dream of the masses. His use of China as part of a cultural repertoire is interesting because it is an aesthetic decision, not a hegemonic one.

Kushigian argues that Borges uses visual objects "for the purpose of systematic identification with the Orient" (19). His now famous and often over-used tiger image is not the Amazon jungle tiger but "that striped Asiatic royal tiger" (Dreamtigers" 24). The discourse of domination consistent with the Orientalist would "name, point to, fix...with a word or phrase, that which then is considered either to have acquired, or simply to be, reality" (Said *Orientalism*). In "Garden of Forking Paths" a list of such visual renderings might be "eight-sided pavilions" (94), "a paper lantern" (95), or "a bronze phoenix" (95). But Yarrow claims that the use of Chinese elements is "not realistic scene setting but directions to a mental state" (81) and later compares Borges' landscapes to the *terraine vagues* of Beckett (81). Realistic scene setting or mere mental state aside, Borges creates an aesthetics based on the oriental repertoire, calling forth a vast array of Chinese literary and cultural artifacts to create the planned effect in "The Garden of Forking Paths."

The action of the story is itself relatively simple: Dr. Yu Tsun, a Chinese teacher of English *cum* German spy on the verge of arrest, must relay the name of a bomb site in France to his German superior. The only

language strong enough to penetrate behind the lines of war is the language of death: Yu Tsun, therefore, murders a man whose name is the same as the bomb site knowing that his Chief in Berlin will be able to decode the hidden communication from the news report. This summary belies a Chinese connection. This story, however, reflects a juxtapositioning of both oriental and occidental characters, reflects reverence for and knowledge of China, and employs thematic and stylistic elements of classical Chinese fiction and landscape design which support the argument that Borges' use is aesthetic not hegemonic.

Borges' *dramatis personae* for "Garden" is relatively sparse when compared to the classic Chinese novel *Hung-lou meng* (1972) (translated as *A Dream of Red Mansions*), to which he makes allusion. "...to write a novel with more characters than there are in the *Hung Lou Meng*" (Kushigian 93) clearly reflects Borges' knowledge of this eighteenth century classic's more than four hundred characters. His use of the name Yu Tsun for the spy further links the two works since this name also appears in *Dream*.

Borges' juxtapositioning of oriental and occidental characters argues that his is an aesthetic not a hegemonic choice. Yu Tsun refers to himself as the little "yellow man," perhaps the other. But Captain Richard Madden, British counter-intelligence isn't exactly an insider. He is an Irishman. Murillo recalls the feelings of arrogance and inferiority of "Ireland toward Britain and of China toward Germany and the occident" (139). The only insider is the British victim, missionary/sinologist, who declares his personal allegiance by adopting what could be described as a Chinese otherness for his professional and private worlds. While Borges juxtaposes the two worlds, his portrayal of China is not reductionist; the East is not lowered by comparison to the West. In fact, Stephen Albert, the missionary from the West, does not save a barbarous culture from hell; rather the East exerts power over him and he changes his profession becoming a student of Chinese culture.

Another aspect of the story which dissolves notions of superiority between characters revolves around an error introduced by the editor responsible only for the opening lines and a footnote within the short story. Critics have often pointed out the altered reference to Liddle Hart's *The Real War*, changing what should have been June to July. Balderston argues that the editor of the story is drawing himself as a careless reader, that only Stephen Albert and Yu Tsun are "prepared to go to any lengths to ferret out the truth," and that only they are "worthy of knowing it" (41). To suggest that the error is without significance obviates Borges' assertion that "every episode [*todo episodio*], in a careful story, is of subsequent importance (qtd in Balderston 41). This line of reasoning suggests the purposeful equalizing of Albert and Yu Tsun, not domination.

Said points out in "Orientalism Rediscovered" that literary histori-

ans "saw the Orient as ceding its historical preeminence and importance to the world spirit moving westward away from Asia and toward Europe" (94). This simply underscores the Orientalist position that cultural reference points articulate issues of colonial dominance and questions "how knowledge that is non-dominative and non-coercive can be produced in a setting that is deeply inscribed with the politics, the considerations, the positions and the strategies of power."

Returning to "The Garden of Forking Paths," Borges selects an English sinologist who deciphers the novel and thus the labyrinth of Ts'ui Pên, great grandfather of Yu Tsun, which had heretofore eluded decoding. Also, a fragmentary letter in Chinese calligraphy written by Ts'ui Pên which sheds insight on the puzzle "was sent from Oxford" (97). Furthermore, the novel was decoded in England; and thus the ancient labyrinth, the product of a Chinese lifetime, now exists at Ashgrove, a "suburb of Fenton" (91). Such illustrations are redolent of the typical Borgesian double-bluff, pointing one direction then reversing, leaving the reader where he might not expect to be. Clearly, Borges with his English education does not attempt to show western superiority by setting his story during a war in which the horrific decadence of the West is blatantly visible; he is showing his sensitivity to detail, not power.

Borges' use of Chinese elements to create an aesthetic is visible in Albert's house and garden, which appear more oriental than occidental: the music, the lantern, the pavilions, the fireflies, and the phoenix. The Chinese word for foreigner is barbarian, and since China sees itself geographically as the Middle Kingdom, everyone else is barbaric. Albert even says it of himself: "I, a barbarous Englishman" (96). But this barbarian, in the hands of Borges, adopts language, architecture, and the culture of the East, not of the West. Setting the story in 1916 reflects the decadence and destruction caused by nations and empires disintegrating, and, as Liddell Hart points out, quoting Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, "there has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited" (qtd. in Balderston 54). This is not a particularly pretty time for the West.

Further, while the novel is decoded by Albert, it is not Albert the Englishman but Albert the "adopted" other who parses the mystery. His home in Ashgrove is not just in a suburb of London; it is at the end of a maze: "take the road to the left and bear to the left at every crossroad" (93). No one has remarked on the similarities of this cultural framing to a Chinese maze in the fourteenth century Chinese classic *Shui-hu chuan*, translated as *Outlaws of the Marsh* or *Water Margin*. In chapter 47 of *Outlaws*, the peasants sing a jingle to describe the maze of the Zhu Family:

> A fine Zhu Family Village,
> Its paths twist round about

Getting in is easy,
But just try getting out! (787)

In this vignette, the outlaw Shi Xiu and others go into the Zhu village as scouts, spies. Since a spy must know the secret of the labyrinth, Shi Xiu begs an old peasant in the town: "tell me how to get out of here." The old man falls for the wiles of the outlaw-turned-spy and says "turn whenever you reach a white poplar. Take the path that starts from there, whether it be narrow or broad. Any other path leads to a dead end. No other tree will do" (787). The emphasis on the maze, the spy, and a specific tree as visual and verbal marker become even more interesting in the context of Borges's story.

In both instances, the spy possesses the solution to the paralyzing impasse created by spatial confusion. The maze-like directions to Albert's home in Ashgrove are similar to the forest maze of the Zhu village with its fixed turns marked by white poplars. Of course, when Yu Tsun completes the ash grove maze, he arrives at Albert's house and looks through the railings to comment on the "avenue bordered by poplar trees" (94). If Borges wanted to establish western superiority, a lorry or taxi would have taken Yu Tsun straight to Albert's door.

The maze is navigated by a spy who is both - and neither - good nor bad. In the action packed *Outlaws of the Marsh*, punctuated with violence, cannibalism, and misogyny, the bandits are the good guys while government officials, even the emperor, are portrayed as weak and misguided at best and at worst, corrupt. The strange code of the outlaws, which allowed terrible atrocities perpetrated in the name of the brotherhood, makes neither the official nor the outlaw seem desirable. In an interesting observation, Borges has Yu Tsun comment, "I foresee that man will resign himself each day to new abominations, that soon only soldiers and bandits will be left" (92), and perhaps, in his mind, there is little difference between the two. Of course, the bandits in *Outlaws*, many of whom were previously good soldiers or bureaucrats wronged by the system, are from the area of Shantung Province, the same region of Ts'ingtao seized by Germany in 1897 and from which we are told Dr. Yu Tsun is a former teacher of English.

Even Borges' use of the deposition as narrative device has a parallel in Chinese fiction, a further illustration of his respect for China. During the Tang (618-906 BCE), *ch'uan-ch'i* or accounts of the extraordinary were popular. Because the author/narrator in these stories was concerned that the reader believe the content, the historical or legal verification of details became a generic convention. For example, Karl Kao translates "The Disembodied Soul" (184–186). The story itself is not pertinent to this analysis but the stylistic device of verification is:

> In my youth I, Hsüan-yu, often heard this story. It has many versions, and some people say that it is pure fantasy. Near the end of the Ta-li reign period [766-780] I happened to meet Chang Chung-kuei, Prefect of Lai-wu [in Shantung Province], who informed me of the events recounted here. Chang Yi was Chung-kuei's grand uncle and that enabled him to know all the details of this story, so I wrote down what he said. (186)

Notice the historical reference to people, place, and event to anchor the story in its current written form. Borges, given to moving in and out of true facts and false facts in his fiction, uses a similar technique in "Garden." He begins:

> In his *A History of the World War* (page 212), Captain Liddell Hart reports that a planned offensive by thirteen British divisions, supported by fourteen hundred artillery pieces, against the German line at Serre-Mountauban; scheduled for July 24, 1916, had to be postponed. . . . The following deposition, dictated by, read over, and then signed by Dr. Yu Tsun, former teacher of English at the Tsingtao *Hochschule*, casts unsuspected light upon this event. (89)

Not only is this editor's entry important for its error, as noted before, and for its leveling or equalizing of the central characters, but it concretizes Borges' use of literary detail, whether eastern or western, for impact. According to Balderston, in 1940 Borges claimed that not only was the Hart work in his library, but it was one of the most often reread and filled with "marginalia" (40). Borges' allusion to *Hung Lou Meng*, his play with the ash and poplar labyrinth from *Shui-hu chuan*, and his adoption of the stylistic technique popular in T'ang classic *ch'uan-ch'i* argue for his wide knowledge of literature, including Chinese, and his use of this for aesthetic reasons.

The house and garden in "The Garden of Forking Paths" are of Chinese design, a setting choice which reflects Borges' knowledge of and appreciation for one of the great passions of the Chinese. A quick review of Chinese design is in order.

The Chinese house with its cantilevered roof was fixed and reflected the Confucian regulation of human society. The house provided little room for creative expression; it represented perfect order, balance, and symmetry. The *siheyuan* or courtyard around which the walled enclosure

and attached pavilions were built represented symmetrical planning and design in its highest form (Knapp 11–13) quite contrary to the defamiliarizing effect of a labyrinth of space or time. In Borges' story, when Yu Tsun comments that he was a "child in one of the symmetrical gardens of Hai Feng" (90), his reference is undoubtedly to a Chinese courtyard not a Chinese garden.

As the Chinese house and its courtyard reflected Confucian regulation, the garden reflected the Taoist principle of harmony with nature rather than control over it. Taoism offered an escape from Confucianism in the way that the garden provided release and escape from the rigid house—it was a place for creativity. Historically, the Chinese garden with its confusing dense arrangements, accented by huge layered rock piles interspersed with pavilions and laced with zigzagged paths and secret places, was a place for painters and poets to receive inspiration. Perhaps Stephen Albert decoded the novel/labyrinth in his own garden. But gardens were more than creative think tanks. They were filled with laughter, amorous assignations, festivals, as well as serious political intrigues—intrigues with messages to decode, espionage bomb-site intelligence to communicate, even murder.

Borges was aware of the importance of the garden to Chinese culture, and this importance cannot be overstated. Certainly, Yu Tsun's ancestor could spend thirteen years on the task of creating a garden of forking paths. From Chinese history comes this account of Pan En who, in 1559, laid out the Yu Yuan Garden in Shang-hai:

> For twenty years I continued to build the garden. I sat a sit, and thought a thought, and rested a rest, but it was still not very good. In the Ting Chou year of the Wan Li period [i.e., 1577], when I returned from Szechuan where I had held the office of Provincial Treasurer, I gave my entire heart to the affair. I thought only of the garden. . . I increased the size of the ground, adding fifteen plots of land. I made seventeen pools. Furthermore I bought many fields and devoted the entire revenue from these to beautifying the garden. My first reason for doing this was to give my mother pleasure. I also invited my friends to come to banquets when we made poems and passed happy hours-the garden daily became more beautiful. (qtd. in Morris 71)

It is not a Borgesian exaggeration for Ts'ui Pên to give up affairs of state, both the power and the pleasures, for a garden. This sentiment is echoed in Yu Tsun's comment that he is "never an enemy of . . . gardens, streams,

or the West wind" (94).

Two other conditions of Chinese landscape pertinent to "Garden of Forking Paths" are the framing of unexpected views and the framing of borrowed landscape. Shaped gates, entrance ways, window treatments, or rock formations can provide the boundaries or frame for a view. While each moongate of each level of a garden opens upon an unexpected framed scene, so Borges' story presents frames through which we glimpse a story as it were that swoops like a roof or extends the frame to an infinite, magical dimension.

At each level of a pavilion or at the turn of a garden path, the view can be quite unexpected. A shift in perspective or a different angle or an unusual frame, like a moongate, can alter what one might have expected to see. Yu Tsun observes at least three symbolic unexpected views. First, he sees the fragmentary letter of his ancestor with the message "I leave to various future time, but not to all, my garden of forking paths" (97). With this message and the reasoning of Albert, he comes to the second view, "that the book and the labyrinth were one and the same" (96). Finally, Yu Tsun sees that the novel of his ancestor is really a discourse on time as "an infinite series of times. . . [a] spreading network. . . [a] web of time" (100) in which characters are sometimes friends and sometimes enemies. Albert reads him two versions of an event from the novel, and each ends with what the narrator calls a "secret command: `Thus the heroes fought, with tranquil heart and bloody sword. They were resigned to killing and to dying'" (99). Yu Tsun actually sees the last stage of this "desperate adventure," the killing of Albert and his own death by hanging. Symbolically, these unexpected views are framed for the reader much like a vista opening from behind an arranged rock mountain in a garden. But perhaps the most vital example of the unexpected view is perceived by the reader in this detective story (where the hanging of the narrator is announced in the beginning and the murder occurs in full view). The revelation of Albert's name to the reader is an "unexpected view" that superimposes the name of a man on the name of an artillery park to be bombed.

Chinese landscape designers create both discrete space cells and the feeling of expansiveness by a framing technique often called the "borrowed view" that includes something outside the garden yet is within the garden's view. Yu Tsun may refer to this concept when he is imagining the labyrinthine garden of his ancestor: "I imagined it untouched and perfect . . . infinite, made not only of eight-sided pavilions and twisting paths but also of rivers, provinces and kingdoms. . . [and it] would take in both past and future and would somehow involve the stars" (94). Like the idea of the unexpected view, the borrowed view is visible in Borges' story. A borrowed view can take in the stars and can reach all the way from England to Berlin, visible only to a Chief who is looking for coded meaning in a

written news account of the unexplainable murder of a British sinologist by a Chinese educator. All of Borges cultural repertoire and each detail lead to this moment of epiphany where the reader senses the impact of "todo episodio" (qtd. in Balderston 41).

Finally, Borges consciously uses conditions of language and translation, around which so much slippage can occur, to create interest and not power. The notion of western superiority cannot be inferred from Yu Tsun's mastery of British English or the reverse from Albert's mastery of Chinese. In truth, the two primary language games are not embedded in a culturally transmitted *lingua*; this is not about linear word order in German, Chinese, English—not even Spanish. The real language of Yu Tsun, the spy, is death, and the language of Albert is the language of the labyrinth, time. These are the languages of all cultures, not of one superior one.

Borges says in *Seven Nights* that karma is cruel and that there is a living infinity: "to arrive at this moment infinite time has already passed" (70). Yu Tsun has lived an infinity getting to Ashgrove, decoding the maze, hearing the music, seeing the poplars, entering the garden, talking with Albert, experiencing the unexpected views of the labyrinth, and borrowing a view to project a voice to Berlin. But, time for him does not end with the hangman's noose. The reader knows what his Chief cannot: of his "infinite penitence and sickness of the heart" (101).

The reader of Borges is frequently left as if in a poplar forest maze where all the trees are cut down and where only the stumps remain. In the midst of such confusion, arguments of power and dominance can be appealing. But in Borges' "The Garden of Forking Paths," the stumps are enough to provide markers of cultural appreciation and indices of use for aesthetic not hegemonic reasons.

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# JULIO CORTÁZAR: POLITICAL ACTION AND HIS LAST FICTION

*Isolina Battistozzi*

Julio Cortázar left Argentina in 1951 and lived in Paris until his death in 1984. About his own political evolution Cortázar wrote in a letter in 1967: "From Argentina left a writer for whom reality, like Mallarmé imagined it, should culminate in a book. In Paris was born a man for whom books must culminate in reality."[1]

This sense of increasing political commitment intensified during the 1970s and 1980s when Cortázar, as a responsible intellectual, took a stand in defense of the human rights and liberation struggle taking place in Latin America. He followed closely the major events of these decades: the overthrow of Salvador Allende in Chile, the military dictatorships in the Southern Cone, the Salvador Liberation Struggle and the Nicaraguan Revolution. They motivated him to political action and a demonstration of his personal commitment to the struggle in Latin America.

During these years he actively participated in international organizations such as the Russell Tribunal and the Helsinki Commission. Supporting the struggle in Latin America, he gave lectures that mobilized other writers and intellectuals in exile, and he wrote fiction. Obviously his last fiction was strongly influenced by these developments.

The purpose of this paper is to read Cortázar's fiction of the1980s in relation to his critical and political essays produced during the same period.[2] It is my goal to illuminate some connections that allow us to build bridges between the different genres of his literary production. These connections will help the reader to better understand the unified political cultural project behind the variety of his latest work.

Cortázar himself was seriously concerned with the writer's task of building bridges, bridges between fiction and reality, bridges joining writers and readers, high culture and popular culture, misinformation and information or counter-information. The exercise of writing must particularly have the function of a bridge extended between those who own the power of knowledge and those who historically have been deprived of that privilege.

An explicit concern in Cortázar's last political articles is to bridge the gap between the wide-spread misinformation and the less well-known truth about the Southern Cone dictatorships and the reality of the Nicaraguan revolution.

This preoccupation gave shape to two of his latest books: *Argentina: años de alambradas culturales* (1984) (*Argentina: Years of Cultural*

*Fences*), and *Nicaragua tan violentamente dulce* (1983) (*Nicaraguan Sketches.*)[3] Both books reveal a writer with a clear consciousness of his own role in these historical situations. He undertakes the tasks of clarifying and diffusing knowledge that was either ideologically manipulated by those in power, distorted by careless journalists, or simply unavailable to the public, as was the case in Nicaragua. In *Nicaraguan Sketches*, Cortázar uncovers the daily life of the Revolution: an immensely happy people, "smiles of freedom and the freedom of smiling", a country in reconstruction looking toward the future, and a country where one half of the population taught the other half how to read; but also a country that has to use its scarce resources fighting the tragic and unfair threat of the "contras" army on the Honduran border. In both books he takes responsibility for providing recent and retrospective supplemental information and even contra-information aimed to correct distortions offered by the press.[4]

*Argentina : años de alambradas culturales* is Cortázar's posthumous message.[5] He wrote the brief introduction just days before his death in January 1984 and left the book ready for publication. The book is both a denouncement and a lucid comment on the most significant events of the 1975-84 decade. It is a careful analysis of the possibilities of culture and literature within the socio-historical conditions in Latin America. Overall, the book is a vital proposal that addresses the old question about the writer's political compromise. Although the title of the book indicates a precise geographic limitation, the content and the reflection it generates go beyond the Argentinean circumstance into a Latin Americanist dimension.

The political and cultural project elaborated by Cortázar in these essays has three aspects. First, with the concept of combative exile[6] Cortázar presents an invitation to his readers to transform the "diaspora" into "agora", converting the void into a space of productive reflection and dialog. Next, he affirms a deep confidence in the power of literature, words, and images as an instrument for changing the historical conditions in Latin America. Finally, he elaborates the notion of a "responsible writer" who, with a clear social consciousness of freedom, participates in the process of Latin American liberation.[7] For Cortázar, changes have occurred in the past decade regarding the definition of literature and the relationship between writers and readers in Latin America.

According to Cortázar,[8] Latin American literature today is deeply rooted in social, historical and geographical conditions. This relationship shapes the current production of fiction. Cortázar sees this characteristic as beneficial for both literature and history. The consequence for Latin American writers is that they must think and act in a context where geopolitical reality and literary fiction increasingly merge, producing a less abstract and more politically effective culture.

In this sense the literature expressing the Latin American identity should not be seen as a closed system of exhumation of native elements but rather as a system of questions and answers regarding national and continental values in relation to the present and future. This questioning includes the whole spectrum of values: political, economic, social, ethical and aesthetic. Offering a space where community values can be discussed, Latin American literature has a social function. It contributes to increase the consciousness and to modify the historical process for Latin American people.

For Cortázar, this productive fusion between geopolitical reality and literary fiction is the antidote for literature as merely a vehicle of ludicrous experience and rootless culture.

The historical changes in the last decades transformed the writers' consciousness and also the readers' expectations.[9] There is a new horizon of expectations for readers in Latin America. They are no longer satisfied with having just a playful relationship with the text. These readers now have political and historical questions such as the value of democracy and socialism, the arms struggle versus pacifism, and the question of fear, torture and violence. Readers in the 1980s turn to fiction not only in search of a metaphysical comprehension of the world, but also for help with understanding their socio-historical position in that world. For this kind of reader, Cortázar said, "the books we write are always literature, but are also *sui generis* projections of history."[10]

In the 1980s, Latin American readers demand a closer relationship with writers of fiction; they must be able to understand and share the troubled situations the readers are involved in.

> "[the readers] expect the compatriot authors of these works to be close to them at the level of history; their demand is a demand of brotherhood."[11]

This new relationship between writer and reader creates an increasing responsibility for the authors.

In terms of the "writer's responsibility," Cortázar is convinced of the importance and the positive results of the work done by intellectuals on the liberation process in Latin America. He defines that responsibility not in terms of specific content or messages in the literature but rather as a participation in a variety of social and cultural concrete tasks. For Cortázar, the time of theoretical political analysis has passed; today is the time for concrete political actions, and these include include writing.

In "Politics and the Intellectual in Latin America,"[12] he expresses his idea that an intellectual's commitment does not necessarily come from a rational understanding of the logic of political theory. A serious commit-

ment could emerge from an intuitive apprehension of the needs of the Latin American liberation process and from a sense of solidarity with the people involved in the struggle. In any case what really matters is a commitment involving the person as a whole.

> "I think that it is now clear that for many Latin American intellectuals political compromise is a question that forms part of their living mental and moral personality and that for them writing books does not signify a task totally divorced from the multiple forms of the political struggle. If we understand politics as passion, as life, as destiny, what difference can there be between that and what we try to create or reproduce in our novels and short stories, although many times their subjects have nothing to do with what is happening in the street?"[13]

I selected a group of short stories -from three of Cortázar's latest books- to analyze for the topics and motives that often appear in his political essays. In his fiction, he elaborates narrative situations, illuminating his major concerns about violence in the Southern Cone, the recessive historic forces in Latin America, and the writer's responsibility to promote and consolidate the liberation process in the continent. Consideration of both critical essays and works of fiction side-by-side reveals to the reader how the different genres in the author's production are unified as one cultural project with political implications.

In an article in *Argentina: años de alambradas culturales*, Cortázar elaborates on the presence of the diabolic in Argentinean society.[14] When he reflects on the experience of "the disappeared," he suggests that a revival of the medieval representation of evil forces coming from an underworld has taken place. One of the most sadistic techniques preserves a massive presence of a phantasmagoric population, a technique that creates a moral extortion by the insertion of fear and hope in the consciousness of those who experienced the disappearance of their loved ones. Unavailable to the family, but not declared dead, the disappeared constitute an absence still present in our mind and in society. This situation becomes one of the most sophisticated forms of modern torture.

In connection with "the disappeared," Cortázar describes the spaces and forces responsible for reinstating a sinister coexistence with demonic forces in a modern twentieth century society. Two short stories from different collections, "Second time around" and "Pesadillas" (Nightmares), fictionalize the presence of demonic forces in society. Waiting in fear and hope is the activity of the characters in both stories.[15]

"Second time around" represents one of the spaces where the

disappearance takes place and the procedure by means of which it occurred. A supposed ministerial office with its bureaucratic "investigation" of citizens becomes the waiting room where the State repression recruits its victims.

Using a classic Cortázarian technique, the story begins with an ordinary summons and a routine interrogation. Soon, a series of rare circumstances surprises the character, María Elena, indicating to her that something isn't right. She is not entering a rationally and legally organized space. Facts appearing to be normal are not, after a slight reflection. The address indicated in the summons is not in a central location and does not show the national flag as in other public buildings. The character asks herself: Why two summons? Something that was not clear was bothering her. "Not on the form, where it was easy to go along filling in the blanks; something outside it, something that was missing or wasn't in its place."[16]

Surrounded by doubts, María Elena waits for Carlos, a student she talked to during the waiting time, to leave the office. Later she realizes that in the second time around no one leaves through the front door.

The horror is built in the story by all the missing elements, by the absences, the lack of explanations. All the characters in the story wait, most of them in the waiting room. On the other side of the counter, the officers are also waiting for their next victims. There is a waiting for the resolution of the horror, a decision between hope and despair: hope that the reality that the characters intuitively perceive is not true; despair for the silence, the absences, the lack of answers.

In the story "Pesadillas" (Nightmares),[17] doctors and family are waiting for Mecha -a young promising student- to recover the consciousness she lost several weeks ago. The young woman has become a body possessed by irrational forces. She dreams and suffers in a nightmare that no one can understand or help her with in any way.

Although Mecha's body is in bed, her real self has vanished. Mecha, as the disappeared, is an absent presence, not dead, not alive, in a time of waiting in hope and fear.

> "Wait -every one said- we have to wait, because in cases like this one, one never knows. Also, Dr. Raimondi said we have to wait, sometimes there is a reaction, particularly at Mecha's age. We have to wait Sr. Botto. Yes Dr., but it has been two weeks and she doesn't wake up. She is like dead, Dr."[18]

The anxiety of the waiting builds the family's hope that any day Mecha will wake up and be liberated from her coma and her obscure nightmare.

Ironically, the moment Mecha does sit up in her bed and starts to talk coincides with horrifying noises indicating the arrival of police forces searching the house and taking her brother Lauro, also a university student.

Mecha's nightmare will vanish, but she only will wake up to another, presumably worse than the one produced by her illness. She and the reader will discover that the diabolic is not a fear of our soul; it has become objective, real, the order of society.

As it happens in one of Cortázar first short stories, "House taken over," the diabolical forces have invaded all the rooms of the social space. Argentinean cities have been taken over by the irrational and dark forces of history.

Cortázar was always critical of the neatly organized order of Western reason, an order that describes a harmonious world ruled by rational principles and causal relations. He created fictions that lead the reader to see beyond this version of reality, into the other side where a more a profound human dimension can be found. In his last fiction, he expanded his questioning of reality from the tranquilizing explanations of science to the social order ruled by the so called "Reason of State," a Reason that attempts to preserve the health of society by amputating and destroying some of its members. The "Reason" particularly destroys the young members of society like the characters in the story: Carlos, María Elena, Mecha and Lauro.

With his last fiction, Cortázar shows how the abnormal in society has become the norm. The character in "Pesadillas" lives in a world where nightmares are no longer an internal fear, or the production of our oneiric imagination. They have become objective reality, created by the hands of our own fellow citizens.

In "Pesadillas," the agents of the diabolic are the security forces; in "Second time around," the ministerial bureaucracy. Both were created by society with the objective of protecting and serving citizens. Both have become elements of the repressive society turned around against its own citizens.

Cortázar creates a fiction unmasking the absurd reality of Argentinean society. For him, writing is an action cancelling the oblivion; it is a reflection about the violence inflicted to society in the body of the disappeared; and it is a reminder of the struggle against the diabolic forces in society.

The two next short stories I will comment on are from *We Love Glenda so Much* (1980). Both deal with violence and the role of art and intellectuals in repressive societies.[18]

In "Graffiti," repression is the background where the action takes place. The action is the process of communication that has to overcome

obstacles set by the police patrols which suppress political messages on the street walls. The messages in this story do not begin as political statements but, rather, as play between two young people who make colorful drawings on the forbidden space. Over time, the colors and shapes change. The intentions and expectations of the two young people grow. Their characters are progressively defined through the shapes and colors they choose. A beautiful loving communication is established between them. The colors on the wall are able to talk to each other before the patrol erase the message.

Suddenly the repression and the colorful art shapes on the wall become the real characters of the story, celebrating a graphic war against the repressive laws of society. At first there was no political message in itself; but the message became political through the will of resistance, the act of persisting in making shapes in the wall defying the repressive forces. Finally, at the end, the message changes and becomes a story of prison and torture. The message of happiness, love, and enthusiasm is interrupted by the intrusion of a police car and a detention. The next message appears after the character is released from jail: "an orange oval and the violet splotches where a swollen face seemed to leap out, a hanging eye, a mouth smashed with fists."[20]

"Graffiti" is a story denouncing the indiscriminate destruction of all channels of communication (political and non-political). It is a denouncement of the systematic isolation of human beings through the terror and fear techniques of repressive societies. But it is also a story about those who dare to confront the sick and twisted rationality of a repressive state. They challenge the "Reason of State" by the madness of doing the unthinkable: a drawing putting at stake the safety of their own bodies.

In "Press Clippings" Cortázar works with two newspaper clippings. The first refers to political violence in Argentina in 1975–76; the second to sadistic violence in Paris. Both include torture and death. The story is a collage of press clippings and fiction arranged as a commentary on violence and a commentary on the possibilities for a work of art and its creator to act politically, producing changes in society.

The character who narrates the story is a woman writer. A sculptor has invited her to work in a joint project to publish an art book. She would be in charge of the text accompanying the pictures of his latest work. The pieces in consideration represent "the violence in all political and geographical latitudes."

While discussing the project, the sculptor reads the clipping denouncing violence in Argentina. The clipping, in the form of a legal deposition, describes the kidnapping, torture and execution of a young teacher, and the brutal consequences for the family who pressed charges

against the Argentinean Army. Both the writer and the sculptor felt overwhelmed by their own impotence and discussed the futility of the art work and the written text as a weapon to fight state repression.

When the writer left the apartment, in unexpected circumstances, a little girl guided her to a place where the girl's mother was suffering sadistic torture at the father's hand. The writer saw the scene and, before she was able to comprehend it, almost in an unconscious reaction and with an uncontrollable strength, hit the man's head with a broken stool, untied the woman and found herself involved in the situation. She actually helped the woman switch places with the man. All happened suddenly in a non-rational state of consciousness. This is how she describes the situation: "what came afterwards I could have seen in a movie or read in a book. I was there as if not being there."[21]

When she arrived home, she wrote the promised text based on her experience that night. The part of the story she did not see, later appeared in the other clipping, a police report published in the *France Soir*. After receiving this clipping from the sculptor, she went back to the place of the events and completed the story with new elements.

Cortázar produces a play of inter-textuality between the press clippings and the fictional text. In the first part, fiction and the denouncement of violence are juxtaposed and clearly separated. In the second part, the two types of text become interwoven and finally merge into one story.

What takes place in-between is the transformation of the character. The woman writer, who has described herself as "very busy," "maybe selfish," and "a writer deeply involved in her own pursuits," takes social responsibility and stops the perpetrator of an act of violence. She gets involved in an action that goes beyond writing and reading literary texts. By her act she has crossed the border to the other side of reality, where she has been touched by violence, a world she can no longer describe in fiction without a personal commitment. She is not the observer or the narrator but, mainly, an active character in the story. Experience and text become one for the woman writer. Reality and fiction are no longer discernible, perhaps because in the realm of violence the reality of terror has exceeded the limits of our imagination.

This fiction is very much in keeping with Cortázar's political essays of the 1970s and 1980s. In these essays, he developed the idea of a responsible intellectual who acts politically, developing solidarity with the victims of repression. This fiction takes into account a new kind of reader in Latin America: a reader who demands more from the intellectual than the production of masterpieces; namely, the sense of brotherhood in facing two decades of horror.

## NOTES

[1] "Carta a Roberto Fernández Retamar," Julio Cortázar, Obra crítica/3, ed. Saúl Sosnowski (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1994) 36. The translation is mine.

[2] I will refer to three main collections of essays. *Julio Cortázar, Argentina: años de alambradas culturales*, ed. Saúl Yurkievich (Barcelona: Muchnik, 1984), *Julio Cortázar, Nicaragua tan violentamente dulce* (Managua: Nueva Nicaragua, 1983), and *Julio Cortázar, Obra crítica* /3, ed. Saúl Sosnowski (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1994)

[3] There is no English translation of *Argentina: años de alambradas culturales.* All the references are taken from the Spanish edition: (Barcelona: Muchnik, 1984). There is a translation of *Nicaragua tan violentamente dulce:* Nicaraguan Sketches (New York: Norton, 1989)

[4] This intention was expressed in "Bocetos de Nicaragua," Julio Cortázar, *Nicaragua tan violentamente dulce* (Managua: Nueva Nicaragua, 1983) 40-50, and in the introduction to Julio Cortázar, *Argentina: años de alambradas culturales*

[5] In my exposition I will analyze the collection of essays as a whole, to provide overall information for the English reader who does not have access to an English translation. In some cases specific essays will be indicated.

[6] See "América Latina: exilio y literatura," *Argentina: años de alambradas culturales* 16-25 and "El exilio combatiente," *Ibid.*, 39-42.

[7] See "El escritor y su quehacer en América Latina," *Ibid.*, 96-117.

[8] See "Literatura e identidad," *Ibid.*, 71–75.

[9] See "La literatura latinoamericana de nuestro tiempo," *Ibid.*, 108-120.

[10] Ibid., 111.

[11] "El escritor y el lector bajo las dictaduras en América Latina," *Ibid.*, 88. The translation is mine.

[12] This article published in Spanish in *Julio Cortázar, Obra crítica/3*, ed. Saúl Sosnowski (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1994) 115–130, has English translation in Jaime Alazraki, ed., *The Final Island* (Norman: Oklahoma UP, 1978) 37-44. 1991. *The Final Island*, 38

[14] See "Negación del olvido," *Argentina: años de alambradas culturales*, 29-33; also in Obra crítica/3, ed. Saúl Sosnowski, 311–317.

[15] "Second Time Around" belongs to *A Change of Light and Other Stories*,

published in English in one volume with "We Love Glenda so Much and Other Tales," in *We Love Glenda so Much and A Change of Light*, trans. by Gregory Rabassa, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984). All the quotations refer to this edition. "Pesadillas" belongs to the short stories collection *Deshoras* (México: Nueva imagen, 1983). There is no translation available in English.

[16] *We Love Glenda so Much and a Change of Light*, trans. by G.Rabassa, (New York: Vintage Books, 1984) 206.

[17] Julio Cortázar, *Deshoras* (México: Nueva imagen, 1983), 119–132. All quotations refer to this edition.

[18] *Deshoras* 121. The translation is mine.

[19] *See We Love Glenda So Much and a Change of Light* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

[20] *Ibid.*, 38.

[21] *Ibid.*

# THE VIOLENCE OF MEMORY: EXCAVATING TRUTH, UNEARTHING IDENTITY IN *ASHES OF IZALCO*

*Karen McGovern*

My dead stand watch/and send signals to me,
they assail me/in the radio and paper.
The wall of my dead reaches from Aconcagua
to Izalco./ The bridge was stone,/it was night,
no one can say/how they died.
**Alegría, *Flores del volcán***

In her book, *Children of Cain*, author Tina Rosenberg writes:

> To the average newspaper reader in the United States, Latin America seems overwhelmingly, numbingly violent, marked by political disappearances, repressive dictatorship, torture, death squads, and revolutions that invariably seem to bring more of the same.... The events by themselves explain nothing. Latin [Americans] often comment that to tell the truth about Latin America, a writer must lie. The truest record of Latin American life are novels. (8)

Rosenberg's words echo those of José Martí, who wrote that "each social state carries its own expression to literature in a way that...tell[s] the history of a people more truthfully than chronicles or journalistic profiles"(Carpentier and Brof 6). *Ashes of Izalco*, by Claribel Alegría and her husband Darwin (Bud) Flakoll, is such a novel: one that depicts the truths of violence and mass murder in Central American society. In an effort to excavate so many sealed and silent graves, in an attempt to name the nameless dead, in order to reconnect the past to the present, these authors use the graphic horrors of political violence in El Salvador to (re)construct a regional and personal identity for Central Americans.

The deep purpose of *Ashes of Izalco* is to recreate *la matanza*: a 1932 massacre in which thirty thousand peasants and farm workers—men, women, and children—were killed. This bloody event continues to resonate in the lives of modern Salvadorans and in the life of Claribel Alegría. When I interviewed Ms. Alegría, at the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Conference, in Washington, DC, she revealed the following information:

> When I was about seven years old, that horrible massacre in El Salvador happened—in 1932 it was—and my house happened to be, it was in Santa Ana...right in front of the National Guard Building. And I remember very well seeing the peasants who were taken prisoner. The crazy Martínez, who was dictator at the time, thought all of the peasants were communists....And so they came with their thumbs tied and crossed behind their backs. Horrible. And then he had them slapped, [the guards] slapped them, and then at night I would hear shots. Then my Nanny would tell me, 'You know those people who came? They were shot. They are dead now.' (Personal Interview 29 October 1995)

I asked Ms. Alegría, if, as a child, she fully understood those events. She told me, "Yes, [*la matanza*] really traumatized me. A child understands much more than an adult thinks....And I had it in me for a long, long time. I was all of the time talking about it"(Personal Interview 29 September 1995).

While living in Paris in the 1960s, Claribel Alegría often spoke to her friends and her husband about the massacre. When Carlos Fuentes heard her story, he told Alegría that she had to write about the event, but, ever modest, Claribel replied, "...look, Carlos, I don't have training as a prose writer, I have training as a poet" (Personal Interview 29 September 1995). In the end, Bud Flakoll convinced his wife that they should write the novel together.

Bud Flakoll, a newspaper man from San Diego, took charge of all of the male characters in the novel, while Alegría wrote only the women's voices. They imagined the love story between two of the novel's main characters, Frank and Isabel, but they knew the conclusion would ultimately transport the readers back to the blood soaked plaza where *la matanza* occurred. Bud wrote in English, and Claribel wrote in Spanish. Claribel claims the greatest collaboration occurred when she and Bud translated and revised one another's work; the novel, one might argue, was cross cultural and dialogic from its inception. Arturo Arias, a five times published Guatemalan novelist and a good friend to Alegría, argues that *Ashes of Izalco* paves the way for a "new Central American novel" (Arias, "Claribel Alegría's Recollection of Things to Come," 38). Arias describes the text's novelty in this way: "Originally published in Spanish in 1966 as *Cenizas de Izalco*, *Ashes of Izalco* is a key work...It...experimented formally in order to create new symbolic codes and [to break] away from the old paradigms..."(Arias, "Claribel Alegría's Recollection of Things to Come," 22). The stylistic originality of *Ashes* is, as a result, born from a resistance against business as usual.

Inasmuch as writing the novel provided a way for Alegría to put those childhood nightmares to rest—that is, the novel functions as a personal journey, a private healing, and an aesthetic experiment—we should also recognize that *Ashes of Izalco* is the first book of its kind to grapple with the 1932 massacre. Thus, the novel also serves an important collective, public, and national purpose. The memory of *la matanza* was nearly erased. During the crisis, and for many years afterwards, the government of El Salvador intentionally censored any information about the massacre. Its clandestine memory rotted in the nation's psyche. Alegría recalls that "in 1932 a cultural lobotomy was performed on the entire nation by the dictator Martínez when he ordered the burning of all magazine and newspaper files dealing with the peasant massacre, and it was done. Our book...was the first historical novel written about the events of 1932" (Phillips McGowan 229). It is important to note that *Ashes* is, in part, such a successful rendering because the authors carefully interpolated actual historical events, and in doing so, were able to turn back the hands of time, to resurrect a significant national memory.

Ms. Alegría confided in me,

> If somebody tried to find out something about [*la matanza*] in the library, [he/she] could go to jail for that. But my father kept two or three little clippings—they were yellow, yellow, yellow—newspaper clippings. And he and my mother would tell me stories, but nobody wrote anything. *Matanza*, by [Thomas] Anderson is much later. We were the first ones, *Ashes* was the first book about it, and I did that consciously. I wanted to tell my people what had happened, so the people of my generation would remember, because I was only seven...and, more, for our children. (Personal Interview 29 September 1995)

Arturo Arias suggests that "for Claribel, coming to terms with the *matanza* was coming to terms with her own identity" (Personal Interview 10 July 1995). Moreover, it is evident that Alegría and Flakoll wrote with a specific political purpose: they wrote to awaken Salvadoreños to a national horror, they wrote to sound the alarm for Central Americans. Mark Danner, author of *The Massacre at El Mozote*, reminds us that "to this day, when someone makes a threat...they invoke the name of Martínez...the author of the *matanza*....he is an icon....The idea of going out to the zones and killing everyone is not a new idea" (49). It is, in fact, an altogether too familiar and proven idea in El Salvador. For Alegría to write *Ashes of Izalco*, she had to dig up a traumatic childhood memory, she had to tear the mask from a national bogey man, she had to come face to face with

the reality of violence, torture, kidnapping, disappearances, and mass graves. She had to confront the dead.

It is, therefore, befitting that the novel begins with death. The principal female character, Carmen, has come home to El Salvador to bury her mother. Carmen describes her father, Manuel, with these words: "Dad would be better off with us, but he doesn't want to leave his house, his town, his dead"(9).[1] From the first page onward, there is the stench of carrion. In her parents' home, Carmen is engulfed by memories; she recalls the death of her baby brother, Neto. She wonders, "Why did he have to die? I shiver and twist uneasily in my chair as I always do when the *why* of death confronts me" (13). Carmen's voice, in "Chapter One," is reluctant and stricken with pain. *Ashes of Izalco* builds one image of despair, one image of death on another; all of these images lead us to the inescapable massacre at the end of the novel. The authors prepare us slowly, cautiously, but in a way that constantly questions us as readers: we are asked to choose sides, we are compelled to feel, we are overwhelmed by the presence of death, and by Carmen's first question, *why*? Why all of these inexplicable deaths?

The novel allows us to sympathize with its complex, flawed, and likable human characters; as we grow more familiar with their personal intrigues, we are simultaneously exposed to the dehumanization and depersonalization that *la matanza* required. We are at once the victims and the perpetrators. We become responsible for and knowledgeable of the evil about to happen. The novel excavates a memory of violence to uncover, at first, a shroud, but at the core of the burial site, a tapestry of human resilience and a triumphant testimony to the truth.

Almost all of the chapters fluctuate between the past and the present; both within the chapters and throughout the organizational framework of the novel, time is neither orderly nor linear. Instead, time is liquid and cyclical. It is almost as if all of the book's deaths are destined to reoccur eternally. In "Chapter Two," Carmen waivers between contemplations of the past and the present; the two seem even to unite as ghosts, living and deceased, people her mind. In "Chapter Five," we are transported to "November 16, 1931."

In this chapter we are introduced to Frank, a journalist from the United States, who is a recovering alcoholic. We move in and out of his psyche through a sequence of diary entries. From "Chapter Five" onward, the novel's perspective shifts from Carmen, who is contemporary, to Frank, who is a man of the 1930s, a man who will witness *la matanza*.

Isabel, Carmen's mother, and Frank eventually become entangled in a love affair. But before Frank and Isabel meet, we learn that he is living a life that is, in essence, *dead*, a life that lacks human connection and authentic emotion. In his diary, Frank reflects, "When I became intrigued

by writing, I dealt with people by taking them apart and reconstructing them in words....This manipulation depersonalized them; it was a way of keeping them at arm's length and of avoiding direct, emotional contact with them. I dealt with words, not with humans" (54). Frank's inability to connect with people is a warning sign to the readers; ultimately, his bond to Isabel will save him from a life of living death, but it is precisely in these moments of dehumanization that abominable acts can occur.

At the beginning of "Chapter Eight," Frank describes a microcosmic massacre in the ocean: "The sea is filled with immense jellyfish. They bob along just below the surface, and the ship slices through them like a plow cutting a furrow through a field of translucent mushrooms". (59). Here, Flakoll implements a successful metaphor—the slaughter of innocents, the ship, an indifferent apparatus of destruction moving through a sea of blood, unfeeling, unmoved, undaunted—an allusion, no doubt, to the death squads, to the countless Central American military regimes, to the killing machines. Describing El Salvador's "dirty wars" of the 1970s and 1980s, Mark Danner writes, "the most visible signs...were the mutilated corpses that each morning littered the streets....Sometimes the bodies were headless, or faceless, their features having been obliterated with a shotgun blast or an application of battery acid; sometimes limbs were missing, or hands, or feet..." (25). The bloody details immeasurable, the corpses too many to count, the *matanza* of '32 would come alive again five decades later. The past will become the present.

How do we account for so much recurring bloodshed? Many would argue that a historically recognizable preponderance of economic inequity in El Salvador sets the stage for strongman tactics. The rich are above the law. The rich run the government. The rich monopolize power and capital. The rich own the coffee plantations. The rich have little reason to relinquish their stranglehold on the nation's resources. Members of the oligarchy, in fact, think of themselves as "nation builders, the people who cleared the jungle, built the railroads, and created jobs" (Rosenberg 242). However, "the landless, 12 percent of the population in 1960, rose to 40 percent in 1975. From 1972 to 1981 farm workers' salaries dropped between 20 and 70 percent..., [and] in 1981 El Salvador boasted the most unequal distribution of land and wealth in Latin America" (Rosenberg 243). Clearly, the people in the countryside can hold the oligarchy responsible for their ever decreasing standard of living, for their political disenfranchisement, for their hunger, for their loss.

When economic and political equality are compromised, so is the truth. As the rich are able to bribe military and government officials, as they are often the owners of newspaper and printing presses, the truth becomes just "a version of reality distilled and sharpened each day as the rich talk only to one another..." (Rosenberg 223).

Alegría and Flakoll highlight the attitudes of the wealthy in "Chapter Nine." Celia, a sister to Carmen, speaks of the poor as if they were hogs. Of them she says, "Ah, you can't do anything with those people....They're used to living like animals, and they dirty everything that they touch" (69). The authors will return to this image—dirty farm animals in a pen—in a subsequent chapter. Before a closer look at that example, we should consider the intersection of fiction and history. In the same chapter, Carmen's family and friends discuss politics in the region. Alegría and Flakoll intentionally insert the names of actual political figures of the time: Augosto Sandino, the national hero after whom the FSLN in Nicaragua is named, and Farabundo Martí, the rebel leader after whom El Salvador's FMLN claims its name. As history intermingles with the fictive world of Frank, Isabel, and Carmen, the novel takes on a more powerful political tone. Alegría's own father escaped persecution from the Somoza regime in Nicaragua in the 1920s, so it is appropriate that Carmen's father and his *compadre*, Dr. Selva, are the first characters to relate the heinous details of *la matanza*.

> 'When I arrived there was a young lieutenant waiting for me. He was pale.
> 'Where are we going to bury all these people, Doctor?" he asked me. "We're afraid the water supply will be contaminated."
> He took me to the main square where they were piling the dead like cordwood. I looked at the heaps of bodies, with arms and legs sticking out here and there.
> "In the wasteland at the foot of the volcano [Izalco]," I told him, and that was all that I could say. (76)

For those familiar with Central American history, it might appear that nature's own forces react ferociously to rebuke humanity's inhumanity. In San Salvador, for instance, amid sabotaged peace talks, increasing death squad killings, kidnappings, and assassinations, in October of 1986, a calamitous earthquake struck, killing 1,500 Salvadoreños, displacing at least 10,000 families, and causing 1.5 billion dollars in damage (Barry 140). With an eerie synchrony, the earthquakes and volcanoes erupt during times of intensified political turmoil. In "Chapter Eleven,"Frank recalls such a volcanic explosion: "The eruption...fifteen years ago was accompanied by a series of earthquakes which left the city in shambles" (79). There is a certain brutal irony here: the bodies of the victims of *la matanza* are carelessly strewn, who knows how many, under a pile of Izalco's volcanic ash. But the memory and anger of the living boils like molten lava, threatening retribution.

In March, 1932, in El Salvador, worldwide depression nearly

wiped out the coffee industry (Barry 137). Those who suffered most, however, were not the plantation owners. On the contrary, poverty and malnutrition spread through the Indian and peasant population, making ripe the bitter fruit of revolution. In the same chapter, Frank and Virgil, a preacher who doubles as a doctor and veterinarian, pass through a village. On their way to check livestock, presumably infected with cholera, Virgil notices poverty's youngest victims:

> 'Did you notice their swollen bellies?...A parasitologist would have enough work to keep him busy for three months just with those six kids. I sometimes think I must be crazy, wandering around nursing hogs or cattle and horses while these people are dying like flies around me. I'd bet my shirt that half the babies born in this country die before they're a year old. And those kids back there—the ones who have survived—are riddled with hookworm, tapeworm, roundworms, chiggers, malaria, and dozens of things we've never even heard of in the States. I know they never see milk or meat. It's a wonder any of them grow up.' (83)

This horrifyingly realistic description reminds us of death's ubiquity and adds urgency to the novel's tone. In many ways, due to chaotic political and economic forces, the poor are destined to a fate worse than hogs. The anger of the farmer workers rises to a crescendo when Virgil inquires if the butcher has sold infected meat to unknowing customers. At that point, an angry mob drives the two men from town, and Frank is attacked and injured by a knife-wielding villager. Yet this juncture in the novel anticipates an even more awful violence that is about to erupt.

In "Chapter Thirteen," dated "December 3, 1931," we learn that a coup has taken place: "It finally happened....The army overthrew President Araújo this morning" (98). If we consult history, we will find, once again, that Alegría and Flakoll are true to El Salvador's past. In March, 1931, a relatively reliable popular election placed Arturo Araújo in the Presidential Office. Concurrently, in the impoverished countryside, Farabundo Martí led organized demonstrations to protest insufferable living and working conditions. Then, in December, 1931, in a coup led by General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez, Araújo was displaced (Barry 137). All of these cataclysmic events led, ineluctably, to the massacre of January 1932: *la matanza*.

Suddenly, the novel begins to move in slow motion. From "Chapter Thirteen" to "Chapter Seventeen," the one in which the massacre will occur, it appears that Carmen, who continues to read her moth-

er's diary, does not want to go on; it is almost as if Alegría and Flakoll also wish to avoid the inevitable. In words that are perhaps reminiscent of Alegría's own emotional hesitance to handle her father's old, yellow newspaper clippings, Carmen asks herself:

> Why did [Mother] leave me this diary, this yellowing notebook with its hasty, inked scrawlings now faded after thirty years? The pages are dog-eared, worn with much handling and rereading. What moved her, after holding these secrets all these years, to pass this to me wordlessly, with no explanation, like a sudden slap in the face from the other side of the grave? (121)

Arturo Arias describes the psychological storm Claribel must have weathered in order to compose the final scenes of the novel: "...as [Claribel] began to rethink herself as a Latin American, more explicitly, a Central American woman writer...in coming to terms with that aspect of her identity, that triggered the memory of what she herself had lived. All of a sudden, she understood that the *matanza* is the most fundamental paradigm of modern El Salvador" (Personal Interview 10 July 1995). Furthermore, Arias contends that in order for Alegría to be able to "reconstitute" an event that took place thirty years before, she had to use this "device of rethinking the past from a future point as a means of coming to terms with memory and coming to terms with the significance of a particular event that lay buried in her unconscious" (Personal Interview 10 July 1995). To excavate the truth about *la matanza* and to uncover a private and public identity, Alegría and Flakoll needed to do more than turn back the hands of time: in some places of the novel, time must stand still.

As we reach the conclusion, verbal images become snapshots. In his journal, Frank records that the "village of Izalco....seemed peaceful, somnolent. From that distance I could detect no evidence of abnormality" (157). But a few pages later, we hear once more about a remote peasant uprising and the fate of Martí. In a conversation with Eduardo Valdés, the assistant manager for Santa Ana's newspaper, Frank recoils:

> 'Our generation is stained with blood,' [Eduardo's] words came to me sepulchrally through the receiver. 'There can be no forgiveness for such crimes.'
> 'Was it Martí who set the peasant off?' I asked.
> 'Martí was arrested in San Salvador three days before the uprising. Hadn't you heard?...I don't know, Frank. I don't believe he was responsible; he was trying to hold

> them back and play for time. I think everything fell apart when he was arrested.' (161)

After this scene, the events suddenly lose their freeze-frame quality and begin to unravel wildly; as if caught in the random crossfire of a shoot-out, the reader must dodge an onslaught of horrible, deadly images. Perhaps Eduardo speaks most shrewdly, earlier in the novel, when he remarks, "Another general slaughter won't solve El Salvador's problems" (126). As much as the characters, the authors, and the readers would like to escape the oncoming violence, it is too late: the time has arrived.

Hundreds of peasants are amassed in the plaza—to surrender their arms, to receive a supposed "scolding" from "General Calderón" (166). Two trucks remain stationary in front of the church; a half dozen others block all the access roads to and from the town. Virgil lifts his head to the sound of rifle fire: "My God, Frank! It's an ambush....They're firing from the trucks!" (168). The bullets fly.

> First a few, then a blind, screaming mass surged convulsively towards the muzzle of the machine-gun on the corner nearest us. They leaped over the bodies of the first victims. Some slipped in the blood on the paving stones; others pitched forward to writhe sluggishly as the bullets cut through them....an invisible wall stopped them as effectively as stone and mortar, battered them to the ground in a nightmare of grotesque gestures, screams that bubbled and spewed blood, crimson stains that soaked and spread through inert white cloth. (169)

In spite of all of the novel's other deaths, we are never fully prepared for these last moments of terror. Frank "stood paralyzed, still unable to comprehend the meaning" of what he was witnessing (169). It is too much to bear. But it will happen again.

In his book, *The Massacre at El Mozote*, Mark Danner provides some insight about the warrior mentality: how and why are these men able to act with such fury, with such impunity?

> "The hard-core [soldiers] really believed that [communism] was a virus, a cancer....And so if you're a guerrilla they don't kill just you, they kill your cousin...everybody in the family, to make sure the cancer is cut out. These officers had Salvadoran history on their side. They had a 'kill-seed' mentality..." (Danner 49)

Tragically, this description approximates all too well the attitude of the perpetrators of *la matanza*. But the soldiers depicted here are not the young men who killed thirty thousand people fifty years ago: they are the military men who murdered more than nine hundred peasants in the massacre at El Mozote. Rufina Amaya, an eye-witness and survivor of this 1981 massacre, outlines the events of El Mozote in frighteningly familiar language:

> I saw them marching along groups of ten each. They were all blindfolded, and they had their hands tied behind their backs. Then we would hear shots, the bursts of rifles. Out in the forest, the soldiers forced the men to the ground and ordered them to lie flat, with their faces against the earth, as they had lain, with their families, the evening before. The soldiers lowered their M-16's and fired bursts into each man's brain. All morning you could hear the shots, the crying, and the screaming. (Danner 70)

This kind of parallel should only occur in literature, in science fiction. But this is not fiction. This is the reality of El Salvador, the daily trauma of Central America: the truth.

How was the truth received by the government of El Salvador? Claribel Alegría tells an ironic story about this matter; she recalls that when her novel was first published in Spain, it was censored by her own country. A person could be detained, beaten, or incarcerated for merely owning a copy of *Ashes of Izalco*. However, with a wry grin, Ms. Alegría explained that when "Molina was in office—that was about 1973—[at the end of his term], he wanted to be very liberal, and he said, 'All of our writers are going to be published!'"(Personal Interview 29 September 1995). Alegría had two friends at the Ministry of Education during this time, and they insisted that her novel not only be published in El Salvador but that it become required reading for the country's youth; amused, Ms. Alegría told me, "Since then, it has been a textbook for high school—I don't know how many editions there are"(Personal Interview 29 September 1995). Similarly, Claribel was later astonished when she learned that *Ashes of Izalco* was one of the few books permitted to political prisoners in El Salvador (Personal Interview 29 September 1995). In this bizarre twist of fate, perhaps some small justice has been done to redress the massacre of 1932. *La matanza* is an event that Salvador's children must study, and more, learn to prevent.

Undeniably, the massacre established a pattern of blood. Arturo Arias concludes that "from the very beginning, [*la matanza*] wrote into its

own element the precondition that other [massacres] would happen...the only way of controlling Salvadoran society would be through massive repression, and massive repression always begets massive opposition that, in turn, begets more massive repression" (Personal Interview 10 July 1995). Even though peace accords have been reached in El Salvador and Nicaragua in recent years, and even though Daniel Ortega's name is on the 1996 Nicaraguan ballot, this miserable cycle of violence is still too much with us. It is with us in Guatemala, where peace remains a seemingly unattainable dream, and it is with us today in El Salvador. Claribel Alegría, who lives in Managua, reflects:

> I'm living in Nicaragua, and it is very important what is happening there because the government is going to have elections...and I think it would be great to recapture all of the ideals of the Sandinistas. In El Salvador, I don't know. The death squads are back again—and that is terrible—there is terrible violence. I really don't know what will happen there, but I am a utopian. I think that it is still possible to create a utopia somewhere. Sometimes I think that I am going to become a cynic because of all of the horrible things that are happening in the world. But I don't think so. In the end, because I am a poet I will never be a cynic. (Personal Interview 29 September 1995)

For those of us who lack Claribel Alegría's optimism, her poetic dream of a utopia, these questions remain: how do we resist the death squads and maintain our sense of hope? How do we bury our children under the earth and continue to farm the land? How do we end this bitter legacy of violence and death?

There are no simple solutions; there is no panacea. But as Claribel Alegría suggests, as did José Martí before her, and as Tina Rosenberg reminds us: the poets and the writers of Latin America have a special obligation to the truth. To preserve memory and history, to (re)construct identity, both personal and public, to atone for so many deaths, the empty pages must be filled, the land must be covered by "flowers from the volcano." With this title, *Flores del volcán*, a 1982 poetry collection, Claribel Alegría summons the image of all those victims buried beneath Izalco's ashes, and she underscores the writer's responsibility:

> Their persecuted voices are one voice/dying by torture in prison. My dead arise, they rage./...my dead wink at me./I am a cemetery,/...and they are too many to bury
>
> (Alegría, *Flowers from the Volcano*, 55)

Because numberless victims die "by torture," many Central American writers write for peace. Because they are "too many to bury," Claribel Alegría writes to remember. And this is what makes *Ashes of Izalco* such an important novel. It is more than an aesthetic experiment, it is more than stylistic innovation, it is more than a beautiful book: *Ashes* provides a synchronic coherence, that is, a way of understanding history over a period of time, that the typical reader would not envision. To wit, the narrative becomes a historical landmark; it helps us to draw connective lines between one massacre and the next. As a result, *Ashes of Izalco* is a museum, a mausoleum, an enduring tribute to the past, to the present, to the future, to the truth.

## NOTE

[1] Claribel Alegría and Darwin Flakoll, *Ashes of Izalco*, (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1989). All further references will be to this edition.

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# THE INQUISITION CASE OF MAURICIA JOSEPHA DE APELO: QUESTIONING IDENTITY

*Magali M. Carrera*

> ...there are seven heavens and in all there is glory, but with this difference: that in the highest heaven, and most glorious, are the priests and nuns; in the next level are the españols, in the third others of inferior quality according to their color and caste. Of course, the Indians and the blacks are in the last heaven and here there is not that much glory because it [glory] does not conform to one's merit, but to one's caste. (*Inquisición* 1768 351-351ob).

This statement was given to a confessor by Mauricia Josepha de Apelo during her 1785 trial by the Mexican Inquisition. Based on my translation of the transcription of these Inquisition proceedings in the National Archive of Mexico (*Inquisición Fiscal de Sto Oficio contra Mauricia Josepha de Apelo*, 1768), I will discuss why Mauricia de Apelo's views about the afterlife and the articles of faith forced her into the legal venue of the Inquisition Tribunal and analyze how this woman disrupted two important discourses of eighteenth-century Mexico: that of social identity and that of spiritual validity. These disruptions were the means by which Mauricia sought to discern what constituted a valid self in a society which constantly invalidated her very being.[1]

## The Case of Mauricia Josepha de Apelo

Mauricia Josepha's case covered a total of seven years and is divided into two separate proceedings in the Tribunal records. The first came between 1768 and 1773 and the second between 1784 and 1785. The case is at times quite convoluted; in fact, one of the Inquisitors notes that the proceedings have taken up much time and work and "consumed the patience of the most suffered" (*Inquisición* 340). I will begin by summarizing chronologically the proceedings of this case and continue with an analysis of the issues raised in the records.

On December 6, 1768, Mauricia Josepha de Apelo was called to the Tribunal of the Inquisition in Mexico City. She was identified as *castiza* [referring to a her particular rank in the caste system], the unmarried daughter of Martín de Apelo, of the *español* caste, and Phelicia Galizia, of the *castiza* caste, and the servant of Francisco Azullar de Maiany. A denunciation of her made by her confessor, Joseph Gonzalez, a month

earlier was read to Mauricia. Gonzalez declared that Mauricia committed acts of irreverence and sacrilege—tearing apart a picture of the Holy Spirit, blaspheming her patron saint and guardian angel. More importantly, the priest stated that Mauricia claimed that she did not believe in the articles of faith (*Inquisición* 311-313). Under the Inquisitor's questioning, she not only admitted to these accusations, but added that she did not believe that Jesus Christ inhabits the consecrated host. Mauricia further elaborated that she had not believed in the mysteries of faith since she was six or seven years of age (*Inquisición* 314).

On hearing the priest's charges and Mauricia's response to them, the inquisitors judged that the 'variability' of her replies indicated that she suffered from a blinding of, or disturbance in, the power of her "*potencias*" or intellectual judgment. She was categorized as an *espontanea*, translated as being spontaneous, natural, or unaffected, but, in this usage, more precisely meaning one who speaks without forethought. She was remitted to "where God will help her"—the care of her confessor Gonzalez, who was instructed to give Mauricia absolution as he deemed appropriate (*Inquisición*, pp. 314ob–315).

In late December, 1768, Gonzalez reported that Mauricia continued to suffer "lesión de sus potencias," damage to her intellectual judgment (*Inquisición* 315–316ob). Less than three months later however, in February, 1769, he reported that Mauricia has repented with a clear understanding of her errors. Echoing the quasi-medical reference of this latest report, the Tribunal prescribed that "penitencias y medicinas espirituales" (penances and spiritual medicines) be applied to remedy this *espontanea*, and Mauricia was formally absolved of her *delitos* or offenses (*Inquisición*, pp. 318–319).

This would seem to conclude the case, except that eight months later, in August, 1769, Mauricia, again identified as a *castiza*, was denounced by another priest who stated that not only had she repeated her earlier *delitos*/offenses, but now also held the belief that the devil was all powerful and that she had more faith in the devil (*Inquisición* 324–324ob). Friends of Mauricia were called to the Tribunal for questioning. They verified that Mauricia had talked to them about her belief in the devil. The possibility of the demon's influence in this case caused perceptible consternation and a shift in the Tribunal's disposition. Unlike the earlier quasi-medical assessment of spiritual disease, the Inquisitor now declared that Mauricia showed no perturbances to her 'potencias' and, instead, suggested that Mauricia was intellectually capable and, therefore, had committed "formal heresy and horrendous blasphemy" (*Inquisición* 326).

In late August, 1769, and again in January, 1770, Mauricia was questioned extensively about the nature of her relationship with the devil, her sacrilegious activities and beliefs, and whether she had shared these

beliefs with others. She wailed and cried and stated that she was fearful about being in the Tribunal, but she stuck to her claims. She expanded on her relationship with the devil and went so far as to state that the devil had told her that the articles of faith were "lies and exaggerations and that there is no heaven or any hell" (*Inquisición* 327–331ob).

In March, 1770, Maurcia was found to be of perfect intellectual integrity without any dementia. The charges were much more serious now, and the Tribunal delivered the opinion that she had "affliction to her conscience." Mauricia was remitted to a new confessor, Pedro Gregoria Campos, who was to look after her offenses and continue to diagnose the extend of 'integrity or damage' to her 'potencias.' Possibly due to an asthmatic condition, she was remitted to the Casa San Salvador, a hospital for demented women, where she was to "repair her conscience and obtain sufficient instructions in the mysteries of the Faith without any theological errors" (*Inquisición* 332).

Eighteen months later, in May, 1771, Mauricia de Josepha, identified as of the *mestiza* caste, was again brought forward to the Tribunal. She was again questioned about her beliefs. Mauricia stated that she continued to not believe in the sacraments; in particular, she did not believe that the sacrament of Penance "pardons the sinner"(*Inquisición* 333ob). The Tribunal instructed Mauricia's confessor to continue to inform them of her condition. In another medical-like reference, Campos responded that as a 'spiritual doctor' he had heard her confession; he judged that she continued to show damage to her intellectual judgment; he added that, at this time, it was impossible to form an absolute determination (*Inquisición* 334).

More than two years later, in September, 1773, Campos informed the Tribunal that the *'espontanea'* had regained the health of her 'potencias,' bringing good to her soul and calmness to her conscience. Mauricia was again absolved and again incured 'penitencias medicinales.' The first proceeding of this case closed with a statement that Mauricia promised to comply with the prescription for her spiritual health (*Inquisición* 335–336).

The curative effect of the 'medicinas spirituales' on Mauricia's 'potencias' was not permanent. Eleven years later, in October, 1784, a priest by the name of Jose Antonio Pichardo, the Chaplain of the Real Hospico de Pobres appeared before the Inquisition to state that a patient in the hospital, one of his confessants, Mauricia Josepha de Apelo, of the *mestiza* caste, single, and about "30-some" years old, had claimed disbelief in the holy faith. Unaware of Mauricia's history with the Tribunal, Pichardo stated that this woman had a good education and that the people who raised her instructed her well in the mysteries of the faith, which she exercised with frequency. Nevertheless, Pichardo goes on, she had never "believed in our mysteries including that of the Holy Spirit, the

Immaculate Conception, the Eucharist and she believes that the Mass is a mere device that is a pure ceremony, not a real sacrifice - in a word, of no use" (*Inquisición* 337–338ob). He claimed to be uncertain if he was dealing with mixed heresy, errors against the faith or dementia and asked the Inquisition to decide if he should absolve her.

In response, the Inquisition prosecutor was quite angered that this "stupid" woman had returned to the Tribunal. He called her a woman of "great incapacity, full of maliciousness;" he also scathingly noted that the case was poorly handled in the first proceeding. The prosecutor ordered a secret report be undertaken and sent Pichardo back to the hospital to question Mauricia's doctors, former confessors, and friends about her conduct as a Christian. Further, Pichardo was ordered to find out if Mauricia had displayed any signs of craziness, mania, dementia, simple-mindedness or disturbances to her judgment. The inquisitor reiterated emphatically that all of this was to be done in extreme secrecy (*Inquisición* 340–341).

A month later, the Inquisition prosecutor's evaluation of Mauricia as stupid and possibly crazy was not corroborated by Pichardo's [November 1784] detailed and lengthy report. After extensive interviews with her physician, the head nurse, and three of her friends, Pichardo concluded that there was unanimous conviction that Mauricia was a very devout Christian and even a holy woman. All agree that she had not shown any signs of mania or dementia and, while she did have episodes of bad temper, this could be attributed to her severe physical illness caused by life-threatening asthma. Pichardo summarized by saying that Mauricia was neither demented, nor silly, nor simple-minded. She was of good conduct on the "exterior;" the priest did have a lingering doubt about her "interior condition." He stated that his experience with her indicated that she continued to be a non-believer (*Inquisición* 346–350).

After reading Pichardo's report, the Tribunal judged Mauricia to be a relapsed *espontanea* guilty of external and internal formal heresy. Pichardo was put in charge of her "to procure an tranquil spirit" and told to handle her "with prudence, caution, and moderation until she can repent." In February, 1785, Pichardo reported that in the course of his ministrations to Mauricia, she had claimed that she believed that the highest glory of heaven is reserved for a very few [(*Inquisición* 351–351ob.) Mauricia's complete description introduced this essay]. He stated that he had explained to Mauricia that this notion of heaven was erroneous and heretical.

Less than three weeks later Pichardo was allowed to give absolution to Mauricia Josepha de Apelo, to be followed by two months of "pentencias medicinales." The final document, dated March 15, 1785, begins: "Yo, Mauricia Josepha de Apelo"— I, Mauricia Josepha de Apelo; here we

note the use of the first person, that is, Mauricia's direct words, for the first time. Ostensibly, the case was closed with Mauricia's words of confession as she states her repentance for her all errors (*Inquisición* 352–353ob).

An initial analysis of this lengthy case suggests that the proceedings lacked linearity or consistency in the questions raised by the accusations and declarations. Seeming *non sequitur* digressions, such as Mauricia's distress over the expulsion of the Jesuits from Mexico or details about the demographics of her neighborhood, while fascinating, confuse the issues. At one point in the manuscript, an Inquisitor states that Mauricia's case is "rare and extraordinary and of serious gravity" (*Inquisición* 1768 326). This remark is an odd reflective break in the usually impersonal legal documents and, no doubt, implies the Inquisitor's frustration with these lengthy proceedings. Further, the Inquisitor's observation indicates the difficulties of dealing with a case involving possible craziness, blasphemy and heresy and the devil's influence, and the fact that despite seven years of various forms of spiritual curatives, Mauricia continues to speak of her non-belief. In other Inquisition cases of blasphemy and heresy, an individual was usually denounced by a neighbor or a suspicious priest for trying to conceal or disguise un-Christian behavior. In this case, Mauricia persists in speaking—that is, in telling her confessors and the Tribunal of her actions, doubts and disbelief.

Indeed, Mauricia's insistence on speaking of, and verbally elaborating upon, her disbelief in the holy faith is the most striking and consistent theme in the case. The authorial voice of the Inquisition controlled and ordered the proceedings, yet the words of this poor, lower class woman continually annoyed and disturbed the Tribunal. Mauricia's voice is most evident in the question/answer sections of the proceedings, when we hear how she identified herself and her actions. Throughout the case, whenever she is directly questioned, Mauricia spoke of herself as a non-believer.

While explanations of mania, craziness, and the devil's influence appear inconsistently in the documents, *espontanea*, speaking without forethought, became the Tribunal's consistent way of categorizing Mauricia and defining her unruly speech. Her doubts and actions were interpreted by the Tribunal as a mixture of sacrilegious acts, errors in faith, and internal and external heresy. The inquisitors recognized that Mauricia was troubled by her misgivings and actions and wanted to repent. While the possibility of mental disturbance was suggested more than once, it was concluded that Mauricia was not demented or crazy. It should be noted that, in general, the Tribunal preferred to assign women to the category of demented; the fact that Mauricia is not, is significant. Importantly, this *espontanea* and her non-belief was assessed as spiritual

illness and treated in quasi-medical terms. She was said to be 'suffering from injury' to her intellectual ability, her imagination; she was given to her confessors who are instructed that, 'like doctors,' they were to apply 'spiritual medicines in an attempt to integrate her *potencias*' and bring calmness to her soul and conscience. Thus, in identifying herself as a non-believer in a believing-world, Mauricia's 'spontaneous speaking' of her agnosticism became a disruptive illness.

Insight into the implication of this illness is not provided by the Tribunal; in fact, it is provided by Mauricia in her imagining of the glory of heavenly rewards. Recall that in explaining her non-belief to the Tribunal, Mauricia claimed, among other statements, that the devil had told her that there was no heaven or hell. In her subsequent reference to heaven, she stated that heavenly glory does not conform to one's merits, but "segun su color y calidad"—according to one's [skin] color and quality [quality/type, referring to one's caste]. This statement places her agnosticism at the intersection of two controlling discourses of life in eighteenth-century Mexico: on social identity and spiritual identity. We shall now see how Mauricia's disruptive "*espontanea* illness" reveals and explores the contradictions of these two identities as they are interwoven into and naturalized by the discourse of colonial life.

Social identity in colonial Mexico was imbedded in the belief that New Spain was made up of two distinct *Republicas: Republica de los Indios* and the *Republica de los Españoles*. For the government of New Spain, Mexico's social structure was based on two fundamental principles: 1) the division between *españoles* and *indios* and 2) the maintenance of internal stability within each sphere. The ideal church-state nation, in Hispanic political theory, was composed of faithful Christians, each performing the function appropriate to one's lineage and one's position in the status hierarchy (Cope 15). This ideal was complicated by the fact that early in the colonial period, Africans were brought to New Spain to fulfill certain slave labor needs. The two Republics of New Spain were populated by three distinct racial groups: indigenous peoples, Spaniards and African slaves. As one would expect, there were extensive possibilities for biological mixing among these three groups; thus, despite the imagined binary social division, a complex and contradictory society came into being. (Cope 1994:15). The *castas*, mixed bloods, did not fit into either *Republica*; that is they, had no legitimate socioeconomic niche.

As early as the 1540s, the Spanish crown became interested—at least theoretically—in ways to bring the *castas* into a social and economic relationship with the two Republicas. The government of New Spain established a *sociedad de castas*, a society of castes (Morner 53), a categorization of individuals in a hierarchical ordering of groups according to their proportion of Spanish blood. In the *sociedad de castas*, a *mestizo* was

the result of the coupling of an Indian and a Spaniard; a coupling of a mestizo and Spaniard produced a *castizo*; a coupling of a castizo and a Spaniard resulted in an *español*; while a coupling of a Spaniard and an African resulted in a *mulatto* (Morner 58). This system led to the identification and ranking of approximately fifteen distinctive *castas*. Further, from the mid-seventeenth through the nineteenth century, "numerous laws attempted to monitor and limit the physical mobility of these castas"(Cope 17) and establish rights for Spaniards and Indians. For example, *castas* were not allowed to live in Indian neighborhoods; Africans and mulattos had to pay tribute; certain official posts were denied to mestizos; and sumptuary legislation denied specific types of clothes and jewelry to certain *castas*.

In eighteenth-century society, one could be identified by one's real or imagined blood lines as belonging to one of three groupings: *espanoles, castas* or *indios*. Once assigned to a category, one's social identity was demarcated. Mauricia was quite aware of this *casta* system—not on the theoretical level but on the functional level. In the course of the case, Mauricia was identified as belonging to three different *castas*: castiza, mestiza, and española. In turn, in the court documents, her claim to being español, a more 'pure' blooded identity, was met with the notary's comment of "it's doubtful." Mauricia understood that *castas* have distinct socio-political delimitations. For example, she questioned why certain española ladies who were in the hospital with her got to use their parish priest, while she was required to use the hospital chaplain (*Inquisición* 351). Here, and in her elaboration on the nature of heavenly reward, Mauricia, I believe, perceived that the social system was reflected in the religious system. On a daily basis, she observed that life does not function with equality; yet, her religion asked her to believe that all people are equal in God's eyes.

Here, and throughout the proceedings, Mauricia intersected and disrupted a second important discourse of eighteenth century Mexico—the power to define valid and invalid religious beliefs. The Spanish Inquisition and its Tribunal in Mexico City sought ways of disqualifying and eradicating the words and actions of women like Mauricia who questioned the faith (Behar 184 and see Guilhem 1981). Their actions, their words, their being, all were denounced as demonically influenced illnesses, fictions and frauds. The designation of deception and quasi-medical references to 'illness' are repeated themes in Inquisition cases against such women and refer to the eighteenth-century struggle of the Mexican church-state to define and control the boundary between truth and fiction (Behar 183–184).

In Mauricia's case, the fact that she speaks out about her disbelief is astonishing and highly inadmissible; her resulting designation as an

*espontanea* refers to the fact that the Church saw a woman's role as silent complicity within the highly circumscribed boundary of truth (Arenal and Schlau 4-5; Franco 55-76). The persistent diagnosis of her as having "spiritual diseases" is an allusion to her potential to defy this boundary and infect the church-state. Mauricia's verbal statements of non-belief and her questionings of the articles of faith are disruptive because she calls into question the authority of church-state to demarcate a valid religious self (Franco 55–76).

We see that, quite incredibly, in her explanation of heavenly rewards Mauricia has elucidated the intertwining of the inequity of the social system with the duplicity of the religious system. In disrupting these two pivotal discourses of eighteenth-century Mexico, Mauricia questions her social identity in the context of the duplicity of religious identity. Mauricia asks: if the ideal community is composed of faithful Christians, each performing the function appropriate to her lineage and her position in the status hierarchy, why would this not be the case in heaven? No mysteries of faith could clarify this for her, and, as a result, her questionings are seen to be disruptive because they put into question the very foundation of the church-state. Mauricia finds her valid and authentic self to be a non-believer in a church-state nation that only validates silent believers. As such, her disruptive potential threatens the power of the church-state to proscribe and prescribe appropriate and valid belief—her '*espontanea* and lesion de potenticia' are potential lacerations in the religious-social fabric of colonial Mexico. This inquisition case, then, chronicles how Mauricia's disruptive illness must be silenced and eradicated. As the case closes with the words "I, Mauricia," we seemingly hear for the first time Mauricia's direct voice. But this confession could not possibly have been written by Mauricia: she could neither read nor write. The "I" we hear is the crushing voice of the church-state filling the imposed void of Mauricia's authentic self.

## NOTES

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# NARRATOR'S MASK(S) AND TEXT'S METAMORPHOSIS: SOME KEYS FOR THE LATIN AMERICAN'S NARRATIVE IN THE 80s

*Hiber Conteris*

I would like to introduce these considerations about some of the most remarkable characteristics of the Latin American narrative produced in the last two decades by quoting a few sentences from Allen Thiher's *Words in Reflection*:

> ...Wittgenstein's search for the many kinds of criteria for certainty and identity that are masked by the seemingly identical exterior forms of language is similar to the writer's attempt to invent or discover new forms in language for redefinitions of self and its way of being in the world, which is to say, in language (Thiher 139).

In order to thoroughly understand this statement in relation to what I have decided to call "the narrator's masks"—that is, the subterfuge used by the narrator in order to articulate his discourse, moving itself through the different pronominal forms displayed by the language—I think it is necessary to read these sentences within their inseparable context. In this chapter of his book, Thiher's analysis is focused on the identity criteria which makes possible the recognition of the enunciative voice in a fictional text, and on the certainty or truthfulness of that speaking voice as well. According to Thiher, most contemporary fiction tries to undermine that certainty or, at least, to invent new criteria in order to offer something different to the traditional certitude that the reader attributed to the objective voice that speaks, for instance, in the realist novel. The first person's narrator of the traditional autobiographical fiction has always had—according to Thiher—a more doubtful status than the apparently anonymous voice of the realistic novel that speaks in the third person, since this self-reflexive "I" makes the reader suspect that the narrative could be inaccurate, partial, subjective, or even an open lie. That explains Thiher's deduction, in the sense that a structuralist approach or understanding of the way in which the different parts of the discourse function, has been, at least in part, the origin of the various kinds of texts that openly show the influence of grammar on the narrator. And not only that, but also the way in which the discourse's several parts naturalize the traditional certainties, even though they mask the identity of the narrative voice.

First assume that any narrative—oral, written, filmed, performed —presupposes a generative act, a verb: the act of narrating. That act determines, at the same time, an actor (Greimas 172/191), a producing agent, the narrator. This narrator may be within the narrative discourse—*intradiegetic* narrator—or remain in an external position to that discourse —an *extradiegetical* narrator. The narrator's voice may expand or split itself into a plurality of voices, or, on the contrary, may enunciate itself as a singular and distinctive voice. In any of these cases, the presence of the narrator is unavoidable. It doesn't matter what the pronominal form is: the "I" of the pseudo-autobiographical discourse, the omniscient third person of the realist objective narrative, the "you" of certain objectivists proposals (*La Modification*, by Michel Butor, for instance), the "we" surreptitiously introduced by Flaubert at the beginning of *Madame Bovary*, or the impersonal pronouns "one" or "them," the equivalent to an eliptical or indeterminate "they." The question is—what is the unequivocal and identical reality behind these multiple "masks" assumed by the narrator? I would say that until about two decades ago we answered this question without any problem of consciousness by referring to the notion of the author. By the end of the 1960s, however, the until-then undisputed foundation of any literary text (the author) was questioned, from different positions and with different intentions and results, by two critical essays. Roland Barthes, in an article with Nietzchean reminiscences, summarily decreed "The death of the author" (1968); Michel Foucault intersected that necrological notice with a more cautious question: "What is an author?" (1969). I believe it is worthwhile to allow a slight digression from our central discussion in order to briefly summarize these two positions.

To Roland Barthes the question is relatively simple: the only reality of the literary text is the text itself, the writing, without any *factotum* to determine, presuppose, or guarantee its existence being necessary. Barthes maintains that "as soon as a fact is narrated the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death" (Barthes 114). And from the linguistic point of view, "the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I" (Barthes 115/116). Therefore, insists Barthes, a text is made of multiple writings and drawn from many cultures, and the place where this multiplicity is focused is not the author, as it was hitherto said, but the reader.

Michel Foucault's proposal is less radical than Barthes' and, at the same time, presents a larger variety of nuances, since the entity of the author is not completely eliminated but substituted by a set of different functions. In our own civilization, according to Foucault, there are a certain number of discourses that are endowed with the "author function," while others are deprived of it. All discourses endowed with the author's function possess a "plurality of I's;" in a novel narrated in the first person,

for instance, neither the first-person pronoun nor the present indicative refers to the writer or to the moment in which he writes, but rather to an *alter ego* whose distance from the author varies. Foucault thinks that it does not seem necessary that the author function remain constant in form, complexity, and even existence. As our society changes, the author function will disappear (Foucault 107/119).

In spite of the notorious differences between these two positions, a thorough reading of the texts that I quoted allows us to confirm that Barthes and Foucault agree about two essential aspects in relation to the author's notion. First, both of them ascribe the emergence, or at least the importance, of the author's person to that particular culture and society in which English Empiricism, French Rationalism, Renaissance individualism, and the Sixteen Century's Reformation reached their culmination in Positivism and Capitalist ideology ("the property system which characterizes our society," says Foucault). Second, both texts point toward an essential notion which, according to Roland Barthes's previous definition, becomes the unavoidable substitute for the author, that is to say, *the notion of writing*.

I am convinced that this description, probably excessively theoretical, about the problems related to the narrative voice, to the narrator's identity, and to the person masked behind the various pronominals forms (the author?), leads us to the concrete problems that the Latin American narrative has faced in the last two decades. These problems have to do mainly with the necessity of avoiding the *ingenous realism* of the traditional narrative (the privileged omniscient narrator's point of view), without being necessarily trapped in the relative *centripetism* of the narration in the first person, where all perspectives or narrative lines come together towards the center. Look, for instance, at what I consider an extreme example, which is also explicit in its excess, of this attempt to disperse or to disseminate (I use the concept of dissemination here according to one of the possible interpretations allowed by Derrida's text) the narrator's focalization in the novel by Reinaldo Arenas, *El palacio de las blanquísimas mofetas*.

The novel begins with the narrator's apparently simple reminiscences in the first person. But when we go a little forward in the text, the narrative splits in a second person which could be interpreted as the narrator's voice talking to himself. From then on, we will find a multiplicity of voices, pronominal persons, narrative times and spaces, which transform the discourse in an inextricable net of enunciations, causing a complex topographic (and typographic) distribution of the text. The author's obvious purpose has been, without a doubt, to expand to the maximum the fiction's scope, through the dissemination of a plurality of points of view, even though these views are apparently subordinated to only one

narrative parameter. If I consider this narrative virtuosity rather excessive, it is because I am not convinced that the multiplicity of points of view and text's fragmentation are determined by a real necessity of the story, and the resulting imbalance between form and content diminish the fictional and also formal impact of the novel. In spite of all this, Reinaldo Arenas's novel still seems to me one of the clearest examples of the multifaceted use of the narrator's masks and text's metamorphosis in the last two decades of Latin American fiction.

Let's take another example, apparently located at the antipodes from Arenas's formal exploration, the novel *Respiración artificial*, by the Argentinian Ricardo Piglia. The narrative opens with a disturbing interrogation: "Is there a story?", and the fictional discourse attempts, in different ways, to answer that question. In order to do that, of course, it is necessary to reconstruct, recover, restore the meaning, coherence and the innumerable parts of that fragmentary whole. How to operate or carry out that reconstruction? Witnesses, voices, documents, speeches, letters, newspapers, memories, disparate pages of a book, even photos: everything helps and contributes to that impossible attempt. The story itself is beyond any possible reconstruction, because its substance is time as well as space, ashes, dust, traces in the sand. What is left at the end of this frustrated attempt—the sediment—is the narrative itself, a different story, the story of the search and the process, the story of the failure. That is, perhaps, the true story: the fictional narrative. We are confronted, immediately, with a second question: who tells, or tries to tell, or who asks about the existence of the story? Obviously, there is here a subject who initiates the quest, who makes a proposal, and who perhaps invokes an anonymous and remote reader to participate in that search or recollection of fragments. Where is this subject situated? Within the same unattainable story? Outside it? Is that subject the narrator himself, as a tempting autobiographical reference seems to indicate?—"In April 1976, when my first book is published, he sends me a letter." (Piglia 13, my translation). Is it, perhaps, unequivocally, the narrator? Is it one of the many voices disguised in the plurality of the narrative discourse? It seems evident that this litany of questions, especially because they allude to the contradiction (explicit in the initial interrogation) between fiction and history, refer us to the two notions that we identified before as central to this article, author and narrator. However, as we already know, the distinction between both notions is obscure, equivocal, and sometimes impossible. Where is the limit or dividing line between author and narrator? What is the moment when the author's voice becomes mute, vanishes, is substituted by the narrator's voice, or becomes that which Foucault (poetically and also rightly) defines as "an anonymous whispering"? The concept of mask or person—remember that the Greek/Latin etymology has a single word for

both concepts, *persona*—seems to be here particularly helpful in order to clarify the dichotomy of author/narrator and the discourse's transformations—metamorphosis—when it is articulated by an anonymous plurality of voices.

An approach similar to Piglia's may be found in the novel (even though the author hardly authorizes to call it such) *La importancia de llamarse Daniel Santos*, by the Puerto Rican writer Luis Rafael Sánchez.

In the introduction to the book, we find a revealing statement: "Some geographies, the lyrics of the songs, his name, other popular names, are part of the limited truth of the text that follows. All the rest is writing that risks guessing..." (Sánchez 3, my translation). And this other statement:

> "The literary genres are calculated suggestions of reading that the writer proposes, keys to accede to the independent room of a poem, a play, a short story, a novel. Beyond the texts that perception demarcates, nearer the texts belonging to the tradition, are the sub-genres, the post-genres, the hybrid and frontier texts, the mestizo texts. In spite of their marginality, in spite of being in the periphery, they claim, also, for a suggestion of reading, for an access key" (Sánchez 5, my own translation)

And after confessing that his novel is a "hybrid, frontier and *mestizo* narrative, exempt of the genre rules," Sánchez flings himself into that kaleidoscopic search—the reconstruction of the historical character, now become a fiction—the same whose name is in the title of the novel. Of course, the variety of resources, voices, witnesses, and the diversity of discourses is as extensive as the text's chronological and spacial dispersion. It is understandable that in face of the hybrid nature of this genre of narratives (in which history becomes fiction, fiction becomes meta-fiction, the author becomes a character, characters become questioning or extra-textual subjects, etc., etc.), the critic is tempted to extrapolate the label postmodern, which is persistently used to characterize the European and North American narrative in the last decades.

Personally, I believe it is a mistake to transplant this category to the Latin American narrative from the 1980s, since the concept *postmodern* is neither historically unequivocal in the Latin American literary history and context, nor an accurate description of the technical, stylistic, and specifically linguistic characteristics of this literature. I must confess that I have no alternative proposal for this designation; likewise, I admit that the postmodern notion (considering the way in which contemporary criticism uses the concept, in a very wide and diffuse sense) lends itself to many

diverse interpretations at the same time that it seems to allude to a present, amorphous, and polysemous reality, which makes it especially tempting. However, I doubt that postmodernity attains to describe with a certain rigor the proteic—"hybrid, frontier, mestizo," according to Luis Rafael Sánchez—of the most recent Latin American narrative.

Coming to the conclusions of these reflections: what is the purpose, the reason, the origin, and the intention (if such a thing exists) of this symbiosis between the author and the narrator, and the plural manifestations of this symbiosis through the changing pronominal forms (persons/masks), and the continuous and simultaneous metamorphosis of discourse(s) in the narrative text? I would try to answer this question by quoting Thiher once again:

> One might suspect that more is at stake, however, than simple grammar lessons when a writer attempts to show that voice in fiction, as in life, in a pronominal function. For many writers this reduction of voice to a position within a linguistic system is another way of launching an attack on the tenets of bourgeois ideology or classical humanism. Writers find in this theoretical position a launching pad for works that wish to effect revolutionary transformations of literature, of views about the nature of the object, and, in more general terms, of ideology (Thiher 134).

If we accept this statement, I don't believe it would be too controversial to say that the "pronominal function" mentioned by Thiher, that masked voice, singular or plural, which is behind the narrative discourse, is always a personal "I," no matter the pronominal form in which it is enunciated. I have mentioned before the notion of dissemination, which at least in some of its significations is used by Derrida to allude to the writing which refuses to grant a privilege to a particular narrative center and, on the contrary, disseminates discourse(s) among several centers, each one of which may question or modify the others (See Thiher 140). The concept of *dissemination* is not totally an original Derridanian concept, since it appears in a 1971 text by Roland Barthes. In that article, Barthes affirmed that "The text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination" (Barthes 168). However, after that seeming dissolution of the narrator in the writing's plural intertextuality, Derrida as well as Barthes finish up by vindicating the personal and unique narrator's "I." Derrida asks "Who is it that is addressing you?"

and answers: "Since it is not an 'author,' a 'narrator,' or a 'deus ex machina,', it is an 'I' that is both part of the spectacle and part of the audience" (Derrida 325). And in a similar way, Roland Barthes admits that "It is not that the Author may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest'" (Barthes 170).

After all—we can breathe now—the author, the persona "I," is back. Or, as Didier Coste lucidly writes in *Narrative as Communication*:

> Now any person used in an utterance presupposes a first person against and with which it makes sense, so that the enunciating 'I', unknowable in its act, is however always represented in any text; and any receiver must determine his position in relation to it. This indisputable fact had to be settled to clarify that first-and other-person narration cannot mean narration made by a first person (always true) or another (always false), but refers only to the varied textual strategies used in the representation of enunciation through a paradigmatic system structurally identical to that of the communication situation constructed by the observer. (Coste 175)

In one of her last narratives, *Novela negra con argentinos*, Luisa Valenzuela unleashes her story with the meticulous description of the gestures of a man who shuts the door in a New York apartment. The text reads: "The man, Agustín Palant, is Argentinian, a writer, and has just killed a woman. In what is called reality, not in the evasive (slippery) and ambiguous territory of fiction" (Valenzuela 7, my own translation). This clarification suggests an interminable series of questions: What is reality? What is fiction? Who is the person, the character, or the mysterious voice who attempts to demarcate those two dimensions of reality, and through that process only further confuses both dimensions? Where is the narrator located, where the author, where the characters, and where the imaginary space of fiction, and the no less imaginary space of reality in which those facts occurred? These questions are difficult to answer, because this symbiotic intersection of reality and imagination is one of the many privileges that the narrator has, thanks to the use of the masks and the metamorphosis of a text as evasive as "the ambiguous territory of fiction": the text which symbolically provides the nonexistent scene of the story.

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# INTRODUCING LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE WITH SHORT STORIES: FIRST PERSON NARRATIVES AS "I" OPENERS

*Donovan Johnson*

The courses I teach in contemporary Latin American literature and Mexican culture tend to turn my students into cultural tourists. For them the experience is a bit like ***Around the World in Eighty Days*** or ***If It's Tuesday This Must Be Belgium***. I want to take them deeper than this, but crossing cultures in any deep way is never easy. How can we take our students into other cultures in ways that touch them more fully than merely the superficial "sightseeing" that often goes with lower division courses?

As a teacher I use documentaries and feature films, visits to class by native Latin Americans (whether international students, local area residents, or travelling peasant activists), and readings in the literature and culture of Latin America to present multiple cultural perspectives to my students. Among these approaches, short stories are particularly valuable.

If we regard a culture as constituted by a set of tensions or arguments that have been unfolding over time, then we can take the material products of a culture as embodiments of some of these tensions. One doesn't have to read third world narratives as national allegories, as Fredric Jameson does, to agree that the stories which a culture produces are vehicles for expressing its constitutive tensions. In fact, the stories generated by a particular culture can be especially powerful lenses through which to examine the essential tensions of that culture. A short narrative, like a sketch, often captures a very small slice of a culture at a particular moment in its history. As a teacher, I find that the usefulness of a story as a lens for seeing into a culture can best be delimited by using it along with multiple other resources which, together, add up to a sense of the complexity of the culture.

Narrative is valuable for cross-cultural understanding of human experience because it gives us access to specific human experiences as embodiments of larger characteristic issues or tensions within a culture. Through their plots, short stories embody the tensions in a culture by representing a predicament which develops through time. In an intriguing essay, José Ortega y Gasset suggests that movement through time affords a sense of cultural depth not possible in a two dimensional photograph. Narrative enhances this sense of depth through the play of perspectives it allows. Stories with first person narrators, in particular, open up cultural dynamics. The first person narrator enters into a rhetorical relationship with the reader, links the reader to the story through his role as a witness

or participant, and allows a different kind of subjectivity than mere participation in the events of the story permits.

First person narratives are unique tools for developing this awareness of multiple perspectives because they invite readers into a dialogical relationship with the narrator through which to see the experience of cultural, ethnic, and class diversity from the point of view of someone who is both a participant in and an observer of the world being presented. First person narratives allow readers an opportunity to get inside the skin of the narrator as "other," often one who is both native to his or her society and at the same time an "other" to significant sectors of that society. First person narratives thus allow the exploration of multiple perspectives that the device of the first person narrator makes explicit. They also encourage deeper cross cultural encounters in the humanities classroom through the dynamic of dialogue which first person narrators invite.

Four major elements in the narrative act—the story as told, the narrator, the writer, and the reader—all become more explicit and become elements of dialogue with the reader when the narrator himself is part of the story. I use first person short stories from Latin America to help my students get acquainted with Latin American culture because there is a wide range of such stories available in English and because the dynamics of these first person narratives can be introduced through several examples on the way to the exploration of longer, more complex first person narrative forms from Latin America.

The four inherent relationships in narrative that the first person narrator opens up to this play of perspectives in dialogue are: the relationship between the narrator and the story; the relationship between the narrator and himself; the relationship between the narrator and the writer; and the relationship between the narrator and the reader. Together these relationships provide a valuable and complex understanding of another culture.

**1. The relationship between the narrator and the story**

The first person narrator has an explicit relationship with both the actions in the plot and its characters. The narrator is recounting remembered events that he or she more or less participated in. This relationship between the narrator and the events has more obscure dimensions in the supposed motives that have determined the narrator's selection of information to present. In this way the story is limited by the limits inherent in the narrator's finite human perspective, itself a part of the fiction.

Lower division students have had little practice in identifying different perspectives and in keeping multiple perspectives distinct in their reading and analysis. The first person narrative allows an explicit identification of perspective-taking that the third person narrative does not as

easily afford. This is because the first person narrator is both a part of the story being told and a character whose occasion and motives for telling the story are to be distinguished from the events which are being narrated. Even if the events of the story are primarily the narrator's own actions, there are still gaps of situation and insight between those actions themselves and the relating of them.

The distance between the narrator narrating and the narrator participating in the action of the narrative varies, even within a given story. For example, in Hernando Téllez's "Just Lather, That's All," a barber who is a secret rebel tells the story of his encounter with the infamous Captain Torres, who is out to crush the rebels through ruthless methods of torture and murder. As he shaves Torres, the barber agonizes over whether to press the blade to the throat of his enemy, but he delays until it is too late. The bulk of the story is the barber's agonizing inner debate over whether to kill Torres, but the barber's reflections during the shave extend the story into the rest of his life, presenting several levels of reality. In this way, readers get both his immediate anxiety and his broader self-understanding as a member of his community. He survives to tell the story later, presenting a unique experience held up to view. At the same time, part of the fiction of the first person story is that when he later recounts the events he does so for some later purpose. In this case, the narrator, the barber, seems to ask his audience to judge his lack of decisive action sympathetically when many of his comrades have died as a result of the decisive action of the captain. Students can identify the difference between the plot itself and the barber's act of narrating it. This provides an understanding of a native telling his own story.

"Cooking Lesson," by Rosario Castellanos, presents a meditation in which a new wife explores her tensions as she prepares the first dinner for her husband. As she broils the beef, she reflects on her honeymoon, her courtship, her romantic fantasies, her being pursued by another man, and a dilemma: which of two constricting positions to take in her new marital relationship. The metamorphosis of her own being during this meditation parallels that of the meat, which shrinks and goes from red to black as the cooking process gets out of hand. Her distance shifts as she alternates back and forth between preparing the beef and reflecting on her broader circumstances and her new relationship. At times the two focal points are conjoined by the shifts themselves: "I've ripped open the package. Red, as if it were just about to start bleeding. Our backs were that same color, my husband and I, after our orgiastic sunbathing on the beaches of Acapulco" (261). The two perspectives represented by these alternating layers of the story work together to illuminate each other in the course of its telling. Students can trace the development of the character and the narrator and surmise about what meaning they create together.

These complexities in the relationship between narrator and story allow space for the subjectivity of the narrator to function as commentary or first line of interpretation of the story's events, which the reader in turn may weigh and evaluate. In this regard, the first person narrator can function as a kind of Greek "chorus," providing a buffer between the events of the story and its audience, a point of departure for scrutinizing the perspective that the events of the story provide. For example, (even as he deliberates over whether to push a little harder and kill the captain under his razor) the barber-narrator of "Just Lather, That's All" affirms good reasons within his culture not to perpetuate the violence in his society. The barber's reasoning helps to question the endemic violence from the perspective of someone who only indirectly participates in it. Yet at the same time readers must decide to what degree this reasoning in a macho culture amounts to a coward's rationalizations. Similarly, the reflections of the bride in "Cooking Lesson" can lead students to consider the limits of the role of the housewife in Mexican culture even as they recognize that the bride's anxiety about her first meal may contribute to her disgust about her new role.

**2. The relationship between the narrator and himself**

The second major relationship, that between the narrator and himself, becomes a major element of first person narrative, especially when there are conscious or unconscious tensions within the narrator that become dramatized in the process of his telling the story. Given the psychological dynamic that people internalize the conflicts inherent in their societies, the presentation of such tensions within the mind of the narrator can reveal the power of their counterparts in the outer culture as a whole. Students can see how these tensions within the subjectivity of the narrator embody broader cultural tensions in the case of the barber in "Just Lather, That's All." His deliberations develop a sense of his need to be true to his professional role in the community in opposition to his partisan's macho willingness to take a risk for justice. In this case, these conflicting values in his mind correspond to the conflicting values that mark Colombian society in the twentieth century.

As a second example, Castellanos' short story "The Gift, Refused" presents José, the narrator, an anthropologist who works for the government Indian Aid Mission in Ciudad Real. He tells of his encounter with an Indian mother and two children in need, his attempts to help them, and the limits to his help as these are defined by the mother. The whole story is his posing of the question of his responsibility to reach across the line that divides the Ladino from the indigene. As an idealistic young anthropologist, he sacrifices his vacation and part of his salary to help an indigenous peasant family in Chiapas. At the same time, he expresses out-

bursts of temper at peasant attitudes on the streets of San Cristóbal. Again, students can make connections between discrepancies within the person and discrepancies within the culture.

To return to "Cooking Lesson," the counterpart to the presentation of unconscious conflicts within the barber or the anthropologist is the bride's working toward a clarification of two major alternatives in her reflection on what her marital relationship can become. The clarity or insight she achieves is a climax of the story that opens up the issue rather than merely providing aesthetic closure.

In each of these cases—whether the issue is machismo and justice or the appearance of propriety; altruism or arrogance *vis à vis* the indigenous; or to control or be controlled—the conflict within the narrator presents a larger conflict inherent in the culture at the level of subjectivity, whether that subjectivity is conscious or unconscious. As students work with these first person narratives, they begin to look at the narrator's character and conflicts for issues opened up rather than for cases whose closure is finalistic and sealed. They enter into the narrator's processing of the issues and the narrator belongs to the culture that they are trying to understand. This makes the student present to another culture as it is represented through the mind of the native narrator.

**3. The relationship between the narrator and the writer**

The third major relationship in first person narrative, that between narrator and writer, may require considerable inference-making on the part of the reader. The question for students is, "How much distance is there between the narrator and the writer and what does this distance tell us about the writer's art or purpose?" The representation of conflict within the narrator, the second relationship explored above, may imply a perspective or purpose that transcends the narrator's own intentions. The potential for this external purpose increases to the degree that the narrator's conflict is unconscious. Thus the two alternatives that emerge as the bride reflects on her situation in "Cooking Lesson," for example, are likely to have been present to the writer at the outset, perhaps as a result of her own divorce, so that the awareness and motives presented as the bride's narration strongly parallel Castellanos' own intentions in writing the story. By contrast, in "The Gift, Refused," Castellanos uses the apparently unconscious discrepancy between the anthropologist's compassion and his temper to show both the ideals and the obstacles to bridging the gap between indigenous and Ladino cultures within Mexican society.

Discussion of the relationship between the writer and the first person narrator often focuses on the notion of the "unreliable narrator," whose limits of perception or integrity themselves serve as an element of the writer's argument. In the most obvious cases, the expressed viewpoint

or intentions of the narrator go in a direction at odds with or representing only part of the overall meaning the writer intends to convey. This discrepancy opens up discussions of the function of irony as a tool of the writer's art. In addition to José in "The Gift, Refused," Victor, the contractor-narrator in Carlos Fuentes' "The Two Elenas," is an example of this distance between the writer and the narrator. Victor, a Mexico City contractor, tells of his relationships with his bohemian wife and her parents, with whom the couple dines on Sundays. The couple enjoys eating out with friends, jazz, foreign films, and the arts in general. Elena, the wife, entices Victor to abandon conventional morality as she spends her time in the company of other men enjoying art, poetry, film, and what else? The family meal one Sunday ends with her complacent father retiring while the mother goes on and on about the details of her conventional upper middle class life, which puts the daughter to sleep. The next day, on his way to work, Victor makes a turn and drives toward what he imagines as a tryst with his waiting mother-in-law. In this story, Victor is a rather passive observer of the dramatic tension that unfolds between his *avant garde* wife and his traditionalistic mother-in-law. For Fuentes, Victor's role functions to expose problems that come with the development of non-traditional culture among Mexico's elite, including the departure from traditional macho qualities among some of its members. This message comes through the irony that Victor allows his wife both to subvert his masculinity, traditionally defined, and to push him toward destructively affirming it in her mother's bed. In this case, Victor's predicament, presented circumstantially but not explicitly identified by Victor himself, tempts him toward a choice that would seem to resolve it for a moment but really would create a deeper, more complex predicament.

Eva, the narrator of Isabel Allende's short story "Clarisa," is a further example. She tells the life of her friend Clarisa in a eulogy that focuses on their relationship at the time of the older woman's death. When Clarisa's husband the judge withdraws to his room at the birth of their second retarded child, Clarisa takes care of the family (later augmented by two normal sons) as well as the sinners, the poor, and the famous. Clarisa's shock when transvestites dressed as nuns oppose the pope does her in. While Eva takes care of the saintly old woman at her death bed, she sees into the woman's lifelong secret. Eva greatly admires the older woman. Yet she gives evidence through the telling of the story that Clarisa is not as exceptional as Eva believes. Thus the story creates a perspective that questions the elasticity of Clarisa's folk morality. This perspective, built into the story through a number of loose ends such as the possibility of murder as well as actual adultery, is very different from the one held by the narrator, who sees everything through the aura of Clarisa's status as a charismatic figure. Allende uses the implicit discrep-

ancy between these two perspectives to explore conflicts between popular and cosmopolitan views of the charismatic figure in Latin American neighborhood life. Like the bride and José, Victor and Eva end by leaving their readers hanging, in these cases between narrator and writer. This suspension invites a response. It is thus more dialogical in structure than the enclosed stories characteristic of third person narrators. This tension between narrator and writer forces student readers to fill in a response out of their understanding of the culture of the narrator.

The relationship between narrator and writer becomes more complex when the narrator takes on explicit elements of the writer's own identity. Two Argentine short stories illustrate this further complexity. In Jorge Luis Borges' "The Form of the Sword," "Borges" tells of an evening with an "English" landowner that centers on the landowner's story of his encounter with a doctrinaire coward in an Irish Republican action against the British. He saves the coward's life, the coward betrays him, the two struggle, and the reprobate coward escapes with a scar on his face. At the end, the landowner points to his scar and reveals that he is the reprobate, to the chagrin of "Borges." The narrative here is structured as a story within a story. The narrator of the outer story is "Borges," a passive visitor to the countryside who seems merely to repeat the inner story of the British migrant to the Argentine borderlands. When the British-born narrator of the inner story reveals his reversal of roles with his counterpart at the end of his story, the inner story's central claim—"What one man does is something done, in some measure, by all men. . . . I am all others, any man is all men . . . ."—is echoed in the identity between the fictional "Borges" the narrator of the outer story and the writer himself. In Borges' meditation, "Borges and I," the writer explores first and third persons within himself in a way that opposes the immediate subjectivity of the one to the reified public life of the other and suggests that the line between the two is continually shifting, even as he characterizes the actions that pass from the one to the other as "games of the imagination" (248). Clearly, with such speculations Borges has moved us to a different sphere of inquiry, the realm in which the most immediate and the most ultimate questions of identity and meaning are raised beyond any possibility of closure. Students can compare this inquiry with the more culturally focused inquiries initiated by other first person short stories.

Julio Cortázar's disturbing "Apocalypse at Solentiname" likewise is a story narrated by "Cortázar," the author of ***Hopscotch***, who holds a witty news conference and travels with fellow writers in Central America. He goes to Solentiname in Nicaragua, takes photographs of its bright, idyllic pastoral paintings, and returns to his home in Paris. When he views the slides a few weeks later, they have changed to documents of Latin American violence and he is sickened at the brutal atrocities they

now represent. His friend subsequently views the pictures while he goes to the bathroom to recover. She sees nothing of this violence, and comments on the rustic beauty of the paintings he originally photographed. He sits, silent and confused. With this unsettling break from realism, the discrepancy between the beauty of peasant community culture and the horror of Latin American political actuality impacts the narrator, reducing him from a witty, urbane, fun-loving, cosmopolitan to a dark figure, speechless and full of consternation. Here the writer uses a version of himself relating to two radically different elements of his own experience to present the breakdown of coherence that comes in the attempt to fathom Latin American social reality today. The unresolved discrepancy posed for the writer/narrator, presented in a way that breaks the conventions of realism, thus opens up a problematic for the reader: how to take an existential position in relation to it. The story becomes an uncanny achievement of what Bertolt Brecht called alienation effect. Students can be challenged to grapple with the change in the narrator from beginning to end and to determine what this change means for the narrator as a cultural traveler.

**4. The relationship between the narrator and the reader**

The fourth major relationship made explicit in first person narrative, that between narrator and reader, extends the fiction beyond the events narrated to include the reasons for and the occasion of the act of narration itself. The narrator is relating the story to an audience for his own specific purpose: to invite a particular kind of response from the audience. This rhetorical dimension is the central element that makes first person narrative more explicitly dialogical than third person narrative. This rhetorical dimension of the fiction is an invitation to the reader to enter into a kind of complicity with the narrator. To the degree that the reader enters into a more immediate relationship with the narrator, the act of reading extends "the willing suspension of disbelief" beyond the "once upon a time" of tale to the "here and now" of dialogue.

Students can best explore this further dimension of the fiction by asking, "Why is the narrator telling me this?" The narrator's motives for narrating entail the fictional occasion for the telling as well as the form which the narration as a whole takes. For example, the occasion of "Cooking Lesson" is the bride-narrator's meditation on her new situation while she prepares her first meal for the groom. The story meditation focuses on her relationship with her husband, yet it takes place during a kind of hiatus between periods of interaction with him. Here the narrator does not invoke the reader: the reader enters into this stream of consciousness as a privileged witness—her thoughts are simply present to the reader. The use of the present tense reinforces this immediacy. It is the writer,

not the bride-narrator, who invites the reader to consider the bride's predicament through the bride's thoughts. Her stream of consciousness takes us back and forth between her actions in the kitchen and her more encompassing reflections. This overall reflective process leads her and the reader to her insight into the two alternatives she has as she takes up the wife role. Her insight at this point is the climax of the story. Which of the two alternatives she will choose lies outside the occasion and form of the story. As a result, students are left to resolve the uncertainty by weighing these alternatives and speculating about what she will do. The student may also question the very alternatives she poses in themselves.

A more explicit example of the rhetorical relationship between the narrator and the reader is the case of José, the anthropologist-narrator in "The Gift, Refused." José is a self-conscious idealist who asks his readers to ally themselves with his mission to help the Indians of Chiapas. The rhetorical situation consists of a kind of secular confession which begins with his acknowledgement of the uncertain status of anthropology as a relatively new field of work (100) and ends with his question, directly addressed to the reader: "What I want you to tell me is this: did I, as a professional, as a man, do something wrong? There must have been something. Something I didn't know how to give them" (107). This question can be taken at several levels because it is an ethical question wrapped up in culturally-mediated gender and professional roles as well as in the ontology of being human. The narrator's confession and uncertainty invite the reader to help him by weighing the evidence both for and against his project both from the point of view of the narrator's culture and from that of the reader's culture as well.

A more complex case of the first person narrator's rhetoric is to be found in the relationship of the narrator "Cortázar" with his reader in "Apocalypse at Solentiname." The story opens with the breezy, brisk, superficial tone of the traveler's chatter: nicknames for nationalities; "Ticos, Costa Ricans, are always like that . . . the usual business . . . " (119). The tone as the narration moves from one person to another with the slipperiness of a comma splice is that of a kind of stream of consciousness immediacy, a kind of intimate confession:

> . . . you're probably saying what a crock of false modesty, but you just go right on saying it, old man, the jackal howls, but the bus passes, I'll always be an amateur, someone who from way down loves some people so much that one day it turns out that they love him too, those are things that are beyond me, we'd better get on to the next line. (120)

Here, the form, the occasion, and the narrator's motives all fit with the friendly ease he portrays in his visit with fellow intellectuals—Ernesto Cardenal, Sergio, Oscar, and José Coronel. To show his semi-defensive response when Ernesto comes upon him photographing the art that the peasants made to sell, he sketches a mock confession: "Yes, I told him, I'm taking all of them, I'll show them on my screen back there and they'll be bigger and brighter than these, screw yourself" (123). This tone contrasts with how at the end he is reduced to silence by a view of his slides that is incongruent with that of the tourist "because everything [had become] one single knot from my throat down to my toenails" (126). Overall, the story is conveyed in the intimacy of his relationship with his Parisian friend Claudine while it shows the painful gap between her comfortable European view of Latin America and his deeply disquieting view of it from the inside. The motive for telling the story seems to be to explain how, when Claudine asks for his commentary on his pictures, the chatty, glib, successful author, of all people, is reduced to speechlessness. Students can compare the two perspectives and discuss the reasons for each, but they can also ponder the narrator's motives for telling the story. "You don't know how or why you do things when you've gone beyond a limit that you don't understand" (126): to what extent is he inviting the reader out of the reader's own glibness and into the confounding that comes when one tries to share or even fathom his own cultural crossing?

**Epilogue**

This essay has presented first person short stories as means of opening up a cross-cultural dialogue between our students and Latin America. As with any true dialogue, what is opened up is always there to be extended and continued. Even in the classroom the dialogue can be extended to longer and more complex writings from Latin America. A few examples will suggest how the approach can be broadened once students have been introduced to it.

Testimonial literature, a hybrid form of writing that makes certain forms of oral storytelling accessible to readers around the world, consists of first person narrative that both claims to be representative of a group or situation and calls for conscience and commitment on the part of its readers. Examples include *I Rigoberta Menchú; Don't Be Afraid, Gringo; Let Me Speak!; Child of the Dark;* and *Fire from the Mountain.* Deliberately controversial works, these stories include the issue of the cultural and ideological relationships between the storyteller and the storyteller's collaborator or agent.

In addition to such works that give voice to peasants, there is a significant body of first person material that can be used to take our students deeper into dialogue with the cultural forefront of Latin America. Such

works include José Emilio Pacheco's novella ***Battles in the Desert***, which presents the narrator's recollections of growing up in Mexico City in the 1950s. In this story, the gap between the narrator's childhood and the time of writing some decades later provides a topic to explore. At the same time, many of the child's original perceptions of that era remain as the narrator's perceptions decades later. The resulting uneven gap between past and present allows the reader to sense each one as well as something of the nature of change that is part of the awareness of the narrator.

The sections of Mario Vargas Llosa's short novel *The Storyteller* alternate between two first person narrators, each deepening in his cultural perspective. The scholar writes of himself and his friend, "La Mascarita." The storyteller, on the other hand, speaks the tales of his adopted tribe, the Machiguenga. Students can learn a lot about the elements of Peruvian society through studying the contrasts between these two voices, each of which evolves out of the soil of twentieth century Peruvian culture.

Another work, the relatively unknown novella *Sweet Diamond Dust* by Rosario Ferré, chronicles the history of the sugar industry in Puerto Rico through a variety of first and third person voices. The play of these different narrators becomes an excellent place to examine the relative proximity of different voices and the degree to which each one impinges on readers, calling them into dialogue.

These stories and many more from the region use the first person point of view or combine it with others in ever new narrative experiments. This examination of a few short stories provides a beginning to the exploration that lies ahead on the dynamics of first person narrative as a means of inviting our students beyond superficial tourism and into dialogue across cultures.

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# TEACHING NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND POST-DIRTY WAR ARGENTINE HISTORY THROUGH LUIS PUENZO'S *THE OFFICIAL STORY*

*Terry Krueger*

As we move through the nineties, I find more students in my classes who are sophisticated interpreters of visual images while being indifferent, at best, to written works. They can talk with insight and enthusiasm about editing and camera angles without having the slightest interest in narrative development in a novel or short story. While this presents obstacles to the teacher of British or American Literature, who must overcome the difficulties of the printed word in order to reach her classes, the teacher of Latin American literature faces an additional problem: students who have difficulty interpreting the written literature of their own culture seldom are willing to learn enough about another culture to interact with and interpret a challenging text. For many of us, the task is even harder. We have students whose out-of-school hours are filled with families or full-time jobs, whose life experience often has not shown them the rewards of reading, and who are often suspicious of "literature" as it was taught in high school and doubt its value. Very few of them will be going to graduate schools in literature. Most are fulfilling requirements, and this first literature class will be the last they take. We must sell our product as well as teach its significance. Therefore, I increasingly find that studying the structure of narrative in cinema is an excellent way to prepare students to read literature intelligently.

There are several advantages in teaching films, particularly for the teacher of Latin American literature: virtually everyone will sit through a two-hour movie, while they may not spend the ten or more hours needed to read a novel; the exotic settings and local color are absorbed visually as though one were traveling; dialogue is interpreted by the actors, leaving the student free to concentrate on narrative structure. Moreover, while the narratives of novels and literature are composed in virtually the same way, because of the compressed time frame in a movie (screenplays are seldom longer than 120 pages—roughly a minute of viewing time for each page), the expository scenes, development of metaphors and symbols, development of characters, and creation of a "narrative shape" are more compressed and often more accessible. Once students are familiar with the culture and story of a movie, they can be shown how to interpret its subtexts. We can show them how the techniques used in writing screen plays are identical to any well crafted narrative: how, through repetition and juxtaposition, one can create symbology and achieve closure; how one effectively withholds information; and how one integrates theme into

character and story. In short, by teaching students the literature of cinema we teach them about written literature as well.

*The Official Story* (*La Historia Oficial*), a 1985 film directed by Argentine Luis Puenzo and written by Puenzo and Aida Bortnik, is a structurally brilliant narrative as well as a dramatic masterpiece. Its central story involves the gradual realization of a teacher of Argentine history that her adopted daughter may be a child of "disappeared" parents, and that her husband is a liar and fascist. I can think of no other movie which so dramatically and humanely introduces students to both the political and personal lives of Latin Americans and provides an entrance for studying some of the complexities of Argentine political and social conditions and the effects of North American speculation in Latin American economies. In many ways it is the ideal movie with which to introduce students to Latin American realism.

In order for students to interact with *The Official Story*, they must first be familiar with recent Argentine history. Even before the return from exile in 1973 of President Juan Domingo Perón, the Argentine military had been waging a war against leftist guerrillas, particularly the Montoneros and ERP (*Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo* or People's Revolutionary Army). After President Perón's death in 1974 and the ascension of his second wife, Isabelita, to the presidency, guerrilla attacks increased in number and ferocity. Within two years the military overthrew the elected government and replaced it with a junta, suggesting that democratic government was unable to deal with problems of internal warfare and economic decline. From 1976 until 1982, when public discontent over the disastrous loss of the Falkland Islands War (Malvinas War) forced them from power, this dictatorship carried out a political and social agenda called the Military Process or *Proceso*. Part of this process involved waging a savage and successful war first against the guerrillas, many of whom were young, middle-class, and educated, and later against anyone by whom they felt threatened including intellectuals.

During this period between 9,000 and 30,000 Argentines disappeared, and the term *"desaparecidos"* or "disappeared ones" was coined. Random detention was common, as were torture and summary executions. Mass graves were found throughout the Buenos Aires region and the provinces. In many cases, when the captives were pregnant, they were often held until they delivered; the infant was then sold or given to childless couples who were connected to the government. The relatives of these stolen children were trying to reclaim them as late as the 1990s. Though it's fair to say that much or most of the public didn't understand the extent of the military's action, the two leading political parties, the relatively conservative and middle-class Radical Party (*Unión Cívica Radical*) and the working class Peronist Party (though the dynamics of Peronism

are far to complex to be limited to merely the working class) both publicly supported the campaign against the "subversives." When I was a Fulbright lecturer in Argentina in 1985 at the *Universidad Nacional de Catamarca*, an Argentine acquaintance told me, "The military never comes to power in Argentina without the tacit approval of the general population." In fact, most of the people I met said they had no knowledge of the "Dirty War" while it was occurring, and others suggested, like characters in *The Official Story*, that most of the people who had "disappeared" were in fact in exile or living in another part of the country with a changed identity. In short, they were in complete agreement with the official story created by the military government.

However, the period of the Dirty War was not merely a time of social unrest; it was also a period of extraordinary economic destabilization. Argentina had been among the wealthiest countries in the world in the 1920s and early 1930s, comparable to Canada or Australia. Prior to the rule of the military junta in 1976, its economy, while exporting beef and grain, had been relatively closed and dominated by native businesses. One of the military government's first acts was to open the economy and integrate it with the international economy. Native industries, instead of upgrading to meet international standards, were destroyed. Foreign borrowing and debt skyrocketed. In 1976, foreign debt was roughly 8 billion dollars; by 1983 it had risen to 40 billion dollars and became a major factor in the economic crisis. While the working class and owners of small businesses suffered, the military, and industrialists associated with them, prospered. *The Official Story*, while concentrating on the personal tragedy of one family, incorporates both an analysis of the political and social consequences of the Dirty War and the destabilization of the internal economy.

After familiarizing the students with recent Argentine history, I begin with a simple question: assuming that the writer is competent and knows her trade, why does she make the authorial choices she makes? The movie is, after all, a work of fiction, one which must entertain as well as educate if it is to succeed.

For example, why would an Argentine director use as his opening three scenes that seem to lack dramatic tension: 1) teachers and visibly bored students standing in the rain in the courtyard of an upper-class high school singing the Argentine national anthem? 2) an Argentine history teacher taking attendance and making introductory statements about her course? 3) this same history teacher, at home, giving her five-month-old daughter a bubble bath? As we tell our students, openings are important and hard to write. They should provide thematic focus and exposition, and should create both narrative momentum and tone. These scenes hardly provide a "hook." They appear static, and are, it seems, relatively uninformative. But, if we carefully read the words of this anthem and

understand the context of when it's being sung, it begins to take on a more significant meaning:

> Hear, ye mortals, the sacred cry: Freedom, freedom, freedom.
> Hear the sound of broken chains. See noble equality enthroned. . .
> And the world's free men answer: We salute the Argentine people. (Puenza)

I first saw *The Official Story* in Buenos Aires. Some people in the audience began sobbing during this scene; others shouted angrily at the screen. Clearly the director understood his audience. Is there a better place to begin a reevaluation of national identity, of the history of Argentina, than a school? Note how the words of the anthem comment ironically on the preceding seven years of Argentine history. There had been little freedom and no equality. Many had been in chains, and Argentina had been the focus of human rights complaints throughout the period. This counterpoint between the anthem and the events of the period creates an ironic tone that will shape the movie.

Once the anthem is completed, we cut to a classroom where an official document is being written, and we learn the date: March 14, 1983. This piece of information is crucial, too. As a result of the mishandling of the Falkland Islands War in 1982, the junta has been replaced by another military leader. However, democratic elections will not be held until the fall of the year, and though the political climate is far more liberal and tolerant, the specter of military rule is everywhere. Despite this threat, many liberals and intellectuals who fled military persecution are beginning to return home.

In the classroom, we are introduced to the protagonist, a teacher of Argentine history, Alicia Marnet Ibañez (Norma Aleandro). While attractive, she is middle-aged, old-fashioned in dress and attitude, and, by her own admission, a stern disciplinarian and hard grader. She teaches the official history and will not tolerate revisionist theorizing. In concluding her introductory remarks to her class, she says, "By understanding history we learn to understand the world. No people can survive without a memory. History is the memory of the people."

A cut takes us into the Ibañez house. Alicia is giving her daughter, Gaby, a bath. As she leaves the bathroom, she tells Gaby to sing so she'll be sure that the girl hasn't drowned. The girl sings the first verse of a song she is memorizing, a song that appears to be a simple nursery rhyme:

In the land of I don't remember
I take three steps and I'm lost.
One step this way, I wonder if I may.
One step over there, oh what a big scare.

The song is picked up by a singer on the radio who continues it thought the scene. The melody becomes a motif that is used throughout the movie. At first it seems like any child's rhyme, but through careful repetition, it comes to mean much more. Eventually Puenza uses it to achieve closure. The movie's final shot is of Gaby sitting in her grandmother's rocker, singing all the song's verses.

That night, as Alicia dresses for a business party, her husband, Roberto (Hector Alterio), the third major character in the film, arrives with a baby doll for Gaby's birthday. In the background, the government-controlled television station attacks media which allow "subversive" elements to flourish. Alicia blanks out the noise from the television and looks at the doll with unusual affection. We hear an unfamiliar male voice speak the words, "It was quite a scare." What appears to be a repetition of the nursery rhyme is in fact the first words of a business associate of Roberto's at the party at the restaurant. Puenzo uses an audio lap/dissolve, to link these scenes thematically. This technique becomes a tool of transition between many of the scenes in the movie.

At this point the dramatic tension of the film increases significantly. The next two scenes, the dinner party at the restaurant and a luncheon reunion of Alicia's classmates, comment on one another, and can be studied successfully in tandem. They complete the introduction of important characters, present social reaction to the *Preceso*, and further elaborate the theme of the importance of history as the memory of a people. During the business party, and despite the presence of a general who is also a businessman, there is no talk of the Dirty War. Though the Dirty War had been over for less than a year, there is no memory of it at the table. Instead, the businessmen laugh over what they perceive as the failure of socialism in Spain. All the men at the dinner party are dressed in black but a young American, Miller, who is dressed in white and is married to a beautiful Argentine. He speaks poor Spanish, seems harmless, almost ridiculous, and is terribly out of place, but his presence is an indication of that foreign influence in the economy which has been disastrous to the country and will soon be disastrous to Roberto. One of the women at the party jokingly suggests that he may not be the father or his newborn son. This harmless aside is a way of introducing a primary thematic and plot device: the question of parentage. We soon discover that Alicia is barren, that Gaby was adopted, and that though the adoption was supposed to be kept secret, it was made public by the mysterious Andrada, Roberto's boss, a

man with ties to foreign capitalists and the Argentine military. Roberto refused to let Alicia go to the hospital to pick up Gaby when she was born, and merely told Alicia that Gaby's mother "didn't want her." Alicia pursues the story no further.

The question of the Dirty War is openly addressed for the first time in the movie during Alicia's secondary school reunion that occurs the following day. Alicia's closest friend, Ana (Chunchuna Villafane), is sitting at a piano in the restaurant playing the simple tune that becomes the movie's second major theme. Ana left the country seven years before and never wrote to Alicia. As they are sitting at a table talking about a mutual friend who looks prematurely old, Dora, a particularly obnoxious woman, says, "All her children became subversives. It's how she raised them." Another friend asks, "How do you know they were subversives?" Dora responds, "If they were seized, surely there was a reason!" When the conversation switches to another close friend, in exile in Venezuela, Dora asks Ana if she's back for good. Ana says she doesn't know, and Dora says, "We can't all chose between the tough caviar of exile and home. Don't expect us to pity you." Ana reacts with shocking vehemence calling Dora "contemptible" and the "daughter of a whore."

During the initial viewing, these five expository scenes seem unimportant, but extracted from the movie and studied in juxtaposition they take on new significance. First we have a history teacher telling students that people can't survive without memory and that history is the memory of the people, and then we have her child singing about a land where people don't remember and, as a result, are lost and afraid. At this point in the discussion it is useful to ask students if this repetition is accidental or whether the director, in these early, crucial scenes, is creating a thematic focus for the film.

Clearly, these scenes let us see life in "the land where I don't remember," where it is easier to live a lie than face the truth. The businessmen have made their fortunes through speculation and foreign investments and want to distance themselves as far as possible from the atrocities of those who let the investments occur. Those like Dora simply refuse to believe the truth of the Dirty War, despite the fact that the lie created by the government is unbelievable. All the others at the table, with the exception of the recently returned exile Ana, remain silent. Perhaps they believe in the unbelievable lie, perhaps they are so cowered by the seven years of military rule that they refuse to speak the truth because of the danger, or perhaps they merely turn away. In any case, the official history, the lie, is in danger of becoming the memory of the people.

But Alicia will be forced to remember. Her students are her first teachers. They educate her by questioning the official history of the death of early 19th century patriot Mariano Moreno, who was very likely poi-

soned by those in power for his political beliefs. Later they cover her blackboard with photos of the disappeared. In a discussion with a literature teacher, Benitez, who left a job at the University of Cuyo in Mendoza because his life was threatened, Alicia asks, "Are the lists of the disappeared true? Could they be like you in new jobs, somewhere else?" Benitez responds, "What do you care whether it's true? Is it your problem? It's always easier to believe the impossible, right? Because if it were possible, it would imply complicity."

In a textually brilliant and dramatically riveting subsequent scene we learn that Ana was taken prisoner by the military because she had been married to Pedro, a man with deep ties to the guerrillas. However, she had not been seen in the two years prior to her arrest. During her 36-day captivity she was repeatedly tortured and raped. She left the country as soon as she was released. She says, "I felt something inside me was broken. I don't know if it can be fixed." Alicia is shocked and innocently asks why Ana didn't denounce the torturers. Ana replies, "To whom could I have denounced them?" Then Ana adds, perhaps intentionally, that some pregnant women lost their babies at the torture centers and that other pregnant women were taken away and returned alone. She says, "These babies went to families who bought them without asking questions." At this point Alicia abruptly pulls away from Ana and ends the conversation. She can no longer ignore the uncertainty of Gaby's origin. She begins a search that leads her to the truth and leads the audience to an awareness of the Dirty War and its consequences that differs radically from the official history purported by the military government.

In the very best stories, all scenes contribute to thematic development. As a result, it is often useful to take information which seems at first glance to be extraneous to see what role it plays. Often, on closer analysis, these seemingly irrelevant scenes become crucial. Such a scene occurs midway through the movie when Alicia goes to confession. She has been to the hospital where Gaby was born and met with woman from the famous human rights organization the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who are trying to find and recover the infants taken from their murdered children. She is confused and doubts everything in which she has believed and is beginning to become aware that, if Roberto were given Gaby, he must have done something to ingratiate himself to the military. In an extreme close-up taken through the screen of the confessional, we hear Alicia talking about her childhood:

> I was Gaby's age. I sat on grandmother's rocking chair and couldn't understand what was taking my parents so long to return. They were both killed in a car accident. Poor grandma told me about a trip. She invented letters.

> For years I waited for them on that rocking chair. I thought Mommy and Daddy had abandoned me. Not until I grew up and saw their grave did I start to forgive them. I used to believe in whatever anyone told me, but now I can't.

Clearly Alicia's childhood story is more than coincidental. She has lived in a world of lies, a land where no one remembers, and it almost destroys her. What is worse, she sees that she's in danger of creating the same world for Gaby.

Another scene which seems to contribute relatively little to the plot is a picnic at which Roberto attempts rapprochement with his family. Alicia talks with Enrique, a widower and Roberto's brother. Enrique once owned a successful small business, but lost it when the economy was opened up to foreign products. He lives with his parents in their house where he raises his three children. (This was typical of the situation I encountered in Argentina during the mid-1980s. The grandparents in these families had made their money during the 30s, 40, and 50s. They built large houses and were able to accumulate considerable savings. Because of the destabilization of the economy and the hyper inflation, many of the married students with whom I worked were unable to rent an apartment even with two incomes. As a result, entire second and third generations often lived under the same roof.)

Because of his ties to the military and foreign speculators, Roberto has benefited from the years of military rule and has tried to ingratiate himself with the family by giving them presents. The father, a Spanish anarchist who fought for the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War, detests the way Roberto has made his money. During dinner, the father says, "The whole country has collapsed, all except the sons of whores, their cohorts—and my eldest son." Roberto immediately becomes outraged, and Alicia leaves the table to sit in a rocking chair, pretending to ignore the argument. Roberto berates his father for living in the past, for being a "loser" both during the Spanish Civil War and life, and repeatedly stresses that he is not a loser. Then Enrique, the younger son, says, in reference to the Military Process:

> And this other war, the war you and your bunch won? You know who lost it, brother? The kids! Kids like mine. They'll be paying for the dollars that were swiped. And they'll repay them by not eating and not studying. Because you won't replace them... You're not a loser.

In this relatively simple scene, Puenza and Bortnik have analyzed the economic consequences of the Military Process on the personal as well

as public level. The children in fact inherited the debt of their parents, and that legacy of international debt still cripples Argentina.

There are many scenes in which the subtle repetition of sounds or images creates meaning through juxtaposition. Fairly early in the movie, during Gaby's birthday, Alicia is given an early clue that Gaby may be a child of one of the disappeared. A magician who is playing the party first impales a balloon with a long needle and later threatens to do the same to a white dove. Although other children are crying and screaming, Gaby remains calm and leaves the performance for the quiet of her bedroom. There she begins to play with the baby doll that Alicia and Roberto gave her for her birthday. She sings it a song and begins to put it to bed when a group of older boys with toy machine-guns burst through the door and begin to shoot at her. Their guns make an echoing, electronic sound. The normally precocious Gaby becomes hysterical. When Alicia comes into the room to calm her, she curls up in a fetal position on Alicia's lap and, for the only time in the movie, sucks her thumb. Alicia doesn't understand what has terrified her.

In a much later scene, Alicia has gone to a cafe to drink coffee with Mrs. Reballo, a member of the Grandmothers of the Plaza and the woman whom Alicia believes may be Gaby's grandmother. As Mrs. Reballo sorts through a series of photographs of her son and his wife, both of whom disappeared during the Dirty War, she tells the story of their childhoods. After she finishes, she says, "That's all that's left of them, four photos. And memory." The audience and Alicia begin to realize the significance of memory based on reality. In addition, throughout the scene, the pinball machines in the background make the same sound as the toy machine-guns had made when the boys broke into Gaby's bedroom. The photos of Mrs. Reballo's daughter-in-law look just like Gaby. The two scenes become juxtaposed because of the repeated sound, and the audience can imagine what it must have been like for Gaby to have the soldiers break into her parents' house, kill them, and kidnap her. The seemingly harmless act of the boys playing soldiers becomes more ominous.

This scene cuts directly to the basement of Roberto's office building. Roberto is exiting an elevator with several stacks of files. Andrada and the Americans have fled with the money, leaving Roberto and his colleagues to face criminal charges. Ana steps out of the other elevator. She asks Roberto sarcastically, "Is the ship sinking?" and confronts him with the question of why Alicia refuses to return her calls. Roberto's answer is simple, "You should all be swept away like garbage." We learn that Roberto and Pedro, Ana's former friend, were bitter rivals. Ana suggests, "Maybe you denounced me to ingratiate yourself to one of your friends." Roberto says, "I would have been glad to do it." This conversation confirms what the audience and Alicia have suspected: that Alicia received Gaby because

Roberto turned her best friend over to the military authorities to be raped and tortured. With this final lie revealed, the silence is broken. But Alicia, too, must learn it before the proper memory can been restored.

Alicia takes Mrs. Reballo home to have her meet Roberto and talk about Gaby's future. When he refuses to talk with Mrs. Reballo and orders her from the house, Alicia mentions what she suspects about Gaby and how they acquired her. Roberto answers, "And if it's true? If the parents were what you said? Would it change anything?" and leaves the room, looking for Gaby. But she is gone. Roberto flies into a rage and Alicia asks him how it feels not to know where your daughter is. She tells him that she has taken Gaby to his mother's so they could talk, but he slaps her, hits her head against the wall, then crushes her fingers in a door. After he finishes and Alicia is hurt and crying, the phone rings. It is Gaby. She wants to tell them good night and to sing them the rest of the nursery rhyme which she has just learned. With tears streaming down his face, he listens to her sing:

> In the land of I-don't-remember
> I take three steps and I'm lost.
> One step backward fast
> And that will be my last.
> Because I will no longer know
> Where the other foot will go.

At this point Alicia hugs Roberto good-bye, walks down the steps, and out of the door, leaving her keys inside. Clearly she has no intention of returning. The door of the house briefly creates a black screen. Almost immediately, the final shot of movie appears: Gaby in her grandmother's rocker singing the song about the land-of-I-don't-remember. Although this shot would have meant little if it appeared earlier in the movie, at this point it clearly brings together the movies major themes and motifs. We are reminded of Alicia as a child sitting in her grandmother's rocker, waiting for the return of her parents who will never return and believing a world of lies, the official story of her grandmother. In this final image, singing this song, Gaby becomes more than just a child of the disappeared. In the second scene in the movie, Alicia warned her class that they must understand the world, that no people can survive without memory, and that history is the memory of the people. Through repetition and juxtaposition, Gaby sitting in her grandmother's rocking chair has become all of Argentina, a country in danger of living in the land of I-don't-remember, of not challenging the "official stories," and trying to do the impossible: understand the world through a false memory. She is both child and portent, a lesson for the present and a warning for the future.

# TEACHING APPROACHES TO *SWEET DIAMOND DUST*

*Nora Erro-Peralta*

Rosario Ferré is one of the most talented and versatile writers in Latin America today. Equally gifted as an essayist, novelist, short story writer and poet, she has also distinguished herself as a literary critic and journalist. Ferré belongs to a group of women writers whose work has introduced a new vision and another voice into the canon of Puerto Rican literature—a vision that encompasses not only the role of women in a patriarchal society but also Puerto Rico's status as a colonial society. Her work, to date, places her at the forefront of the Puerto Rican literary scene.

Ferré was born (28 September 1938) in the city of Ponce, on the southern coast of Puerto Rico, to one of the island's most prominent families. Her mother, Lorenza Ramírez Ferré, came from an elite, landowning family while her father, Luis Ferré, a representative of upper class industrial and banking interests, served as governor of the island from 1968 to 1972. As a child, she was so deeply influenced by the fairy tales and stories related by her black nanny, Gilda, that she took to composing stories of her own at an early age (Erro-Orthmann and Mendizábal 7). After graduating from Manhattanville College in the United States, Rosario Ferré returned to her native land to pursue graduate studies in literature at the University of Puerto Rico, where she was fortunate enough to meet the Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa and the Uruguayan critic Angel Rama, both of whom encouraged her to pursue her own writing. In 1974, she graduated from the University of Puerto Rico in Río Piedras with an M.A. in Hispanic Studies; some years later (1987), she received a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland, writing her dissertation on the work of Julio Cortázar.

While still pursuing her studies at the University of Puerto Rico, she also founded and directed a literary journal - *Zona de carga y descarga (Loading and Unloading Zone)* - in 1972. This journal, committed to artistic and social renewal, published the works of many up-and-coming, though yet unknown, writers. Although the publication was short-lived, it made a considerable contribution to Puerto Rican literature and politics at the time and was influential in bringing attention to the work of a new generation of artists. It was here that Ferré published her own first short story, entitled "La muñeca menor" (The Youngest Doll). In 1976, she moved to Mexico and there she published her first book: *Papeles de Pandora* (1976, translated by the author as *The Youngest Doll*, 1991). The book has been considered something of a feminist manifesto for its critical portrayal of the dependent, marginal position of women in Puerto Rican society. This

has proved to be a continuing theme throughout her work: pointing out the oppressive nature of the roles historically assigned to women in patriarchal societies on the one hand, and the struggle of women to escape and reject that socially imposed destiny on the other.

Ferré has given us an account of her own creative progress in the essay entitled "The Writer's Kitchen," in which she describes her initial attempts to write and explains how the examples and experiences of such authors as Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Wolf inspired her to seek out and pursue personal and artistic authenticity in all her work (Meyer 227). In her fiction, Ferré reveals not only a unique literary talent but also a superb mastery of language that finds expression in both the creation of unusual images and the weaving of intricate plots, whose characters frequently move within a cloud of mystery and suspense.

Rosario Ferré is a prolific writer. Her work to date includes the following: a collection of short stories and poems, *Papeles de Pandora;* three collections of stories for children, *El medio pollito* (1976, *The Half Chick*), *La mona que le pisaron la cola* (1981, *The Monkey Whose Tail Was Stepped On*), and *Los cuentos de Juan Bobo* (1981, *Tales of Juan Bobo*); a collection of poems, *Fábulas de la garza desangrada,* (1982, *Fables of the Bleeding Hero*); a collection of poems and short stories, *Las dos Venecias* (1992, *The Two Venices*); and three longer novels: *Maldito amor,* 1986, (published as *Sweet Diamond Dust* in 1988), *La batalla de las vírgenes* (1993, *The Battle of the Virgins*), and *The House on the Lagoon,* (1995). Her essays and literary criticism include *Sitio a Eros: Siete ensayos literarios* (1986, *Besieging Eros: Seven Literary Essays*), and *El coloquio de las perras* (1990, *The Colloquium of Dogs*).

**The Novel: *Sweet Diamond Dust***

In 1986, Ferré published the novel *Maldito amor,* which was published in English two years later under the title of *Sweet Diamond Dust* (1988). The book is comprised of a short novella of the title—*Maldito amor*—plus three additional stories: "El regalo" (The Gift), "Isolda en el espejo" (Isolda in the Mirror), and "La extraña muerte del capitancito Candelario" (The Strange Death of Little Captain Candelario). Although each of the stories is complete in and of itself and can be read independently of the others, they are united by a common theme: the revision and appropriation of official history by groups that have been marginalized and/or oppressed by society: women, the poor, and people of color.

When Ferré first translated the novel into English, she met with a number of obstacles, starting with the title. As she explains in the article "Destiny, Language, and Translation, or Ophelia Adrift in the C & C Canal":

> "Maldito amor" in Spanish is an idiomatic expression

> impossible to render accurately in English .... The title of the novel in Spanish is, in this sense, almost a benign form of swearing, or of complaining about the treacherous nature of love. In addition to all this, the title is also the title of a very famous *danza* written by Juan Morel Campos, Puerto Rico's most gifted composer in the nineteenth century, which describes in its verses the paradisiacal existence of the island's bourgeoisie at the time. As this complicated wordplay would have been totally lost in English, as well as the cultural reference to a musical composition that is well known only on the island, I decided to change the title altogether, replacing it with a much more specific one, "Sweet Diamond Dust." The new title refers to the sugar produced by the De Lavalle family, but it also touches on the dangers of a sugar that, like diamond dust, poisons those who sweeten their lives with it (Castro-Klaren 92).

In *Sweet Diamond Dust*, Ferré is able to combine social and historical issues with the interior world of emotion, intuition, and passion. The novella traces the lives of several generations of a Puerto Rican family living on the island, from the time of the US occupation to the middle of the twentieth century. The major focus is on families of the upper class and the impact they have on the island's other social classes. In particular, it is concerned with the changes in social and economic relations that take place during this period, from that of the original "sugar barons" who dominated the economy and society at the turn of the century, through to their collusion with, and eventual displacement by, the large US corporations which co-opted them and made them dependent upon North American economic interests.

*Sweet Diamond Dust* follows the fortunes of the de la Valle family across four generations, from 1898 to the 1950s. The plot revolves around Sweet Diamond, the family sugar mill and hacienda, whose story is told via several narrators. The primary narrator is Don Hermenegildo Martínez, a lawyer who sets out to write the history of the fictional town of Guamaní and of its hero (and his friend), Ubaldino de la Valle. The basic thrust of his story is to show how de la Valle saved a dying sugarcane plantation but did so while defying US corporations that were trying to take control of the industry. His story is repeatedly interrupted throughout by various other important characters who offer divergent accounts of the same events: by Arístides (brother of Ubaldino), by Titina (the family servant), by Doña Laura (the dying widow), and by Gloria (Ubaldino's nurse and mistress). The climax comes when Gloria sets the

house—containing Don Hermenegildo and the remaining members of the de la Valle family—on fire. With a single exception, the major characters who offer up versions that differ with, and challenge, the "official" story are all women who, as such, are viewed as marginal to the events themselves, befitting their role in society. Nevertheless, it is their account of events which undercuts, and eventually destroys, the official version. In the telling, the women, as oppressed under the newer "modern" society as they were under the old plantocracy, finally rise up and assert themselves, taking control of their lives and destinies in defiance of traditional bourgeois norms.

The story of *Sweet Diamond Dust* plays with perspectives and voices to the point that the authority of the original narrator is gradually subverted by the intruding, and differing, versions of the female characters. By introducing accounts of the family history at odds with that presented by the primary narrator, the credibility of the latter is gradually called into question and the authority of his story is stripped of its power. In this way, the women play a subversive role, undermining the authority of patriarchal society by revealing the hollowness of the male version of history. Here, as in many of her other works, Ferré rewrites Puerto Rican history from a female, if not a feminist, perspective.

Ferré herself has said, in an essay entitled "Memorias de *Maldito amor*" which was later included in the second Spanish edition (1988) as a prologue, that the novel is a parody of the novel of the land, a very popular genre in the first half of this century. She makes particular reference, in this regard, to Enrique Laguerre's *La llamarada*, *Solar Montoya*, *Cauce sin río*, as well as to *La carreta* by René Marqués. She also explains that her intention was to define Puerto Rican nationality; to that end she acknowledges her debt to, and the contributions of, Gautier Benítez, José de Diego and Lloréns Torres. In discussing her work, Ferré also points out (as mentioned above) that she took the title of the book from a *danza* by Morel Campos, one of Puerto Rico's most prolific nineteenth century composers (9–14). This second edition also contains a "Coda histórica," in which she quotes from the Law of Five Hundred Acres, also known as the Law of Puerto Rican Lands of April 1941 (187–90).

**Suggestions to the instructor for analyzing *Sweet Diamond Dust***

To use this story effectively in the classroom, the instructor should provide not only biographical information about the author but also some introduction to Puerto Rican culture, history, and politics. The latter should include (1) a definition of Puerto Rico's present political status *vis-a-vis* the United States; (2) its geographical location (preferably with a map); (3) an explanation of significant events in Puerto Rican history; and (4) authors and works that have contributed to contemporary Puerto

Rican literature and culture. Introductory material of this type is essential since so much of the story is influenced by, or refers to, various events in Puerto Rican history and because many of its characters are drawn from Puerto Rican society. In this sense, the novel could easily be viewed as a *roman a clef*. For example, the character of Ubaldino appears to be modeled after that of José de Diego (1866–1918), a journalist, lawyer, and politician who espoused and defended independence for Puerto Rico; the story replicates many details of his life (Peréz Marín 39).

Following are some suggestions designed to help students improve their comprehension and, thus, facilitate their analysis of the novel and its elements. Most of these activities should be undertaken only after the students have read each part in its entirety. First, it is useful to start by discussing the various elements of the novel, such as titles, prefaces, and epigraphs, in order to gain some insight into, and perspective about, the work before the actual reading begins. The title of a novel usually refers to, and introduces, themes and/or events that will appear in the narrative. For example, examining Ferré's own statement regarding the translation of the novel's title clarifies the main theme and helps the student to know what to look for in the story. Suggest that students underline passages that clarify the title.

Next, focus the students' attention on the two epigraphs. Read the verses and discuss their possible meanings. Pose questions such as the following to the students: why did Ferré chose these particular quotes as an introduction to her story? what key ideas do they present? how do they relate to the text?

At this point, it is important to mention the background of the two poets and discuss the relevance of their poems. Francisco de Quevedo (1580–1645) is a famous Baroque poet of the Spanish Golden Age. His style is known as *conceptista*, because he emphasizes concepts which are expressed in his poetry through a play on words. The poem quoted here is one in which which he tries to define love. José Gautier Benítez (1851–1880), a romantic poet par excellence, wrote poems about love and his homeland. These verses come from the "Poem of Puerto Rico,"in which the poet tried to define the island. In their anthology of Puerto Rican literature, María Teresa Babín and Stan Steiner have translated Gautier Benítez's lines in this fashion:

> A pearl the sea tears from its shell
> in the graceful undulating waves,
> heron asleep within the white foam
> along the snowy edge of your shores. (89)

The novel's structure is fairly complex, given the intertwining of

various narratives by the different characters. It consists of eight titled chapters narrated by different individuals: Chapters I, II, IV, and VI represent the text of Don Hermenegildo's novel, which he is in the process of writing, whereas Chapters III, V, VII and VIII each represent the narrative of a different character - Titina, Arístides, Doña Laura, and Gloria, respectively.

### Questions for analyzing *Sweet Diamond Dust*

Due to the complexity of the novel's structure, it would be useful to distribute a few study questions to students, as a form of guidance, in advance of the discussion of each chapter. Most of the activities suggested are best done after the students have read each part completely.

**Introductory questions about the novel:**

What is the importance of the title? To whom is the novel dedicated? What is the significance of the epigraphs? How many chapters are there? Who narrates each chapter?

**Chapter I: Guamaní**

What is Guamaní like? Who are the Taínos? Who was Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo? Why does the narrative voice describe fruits and vegetables in such detail? How did the people live in this country? Who is narrating the story? Why is the text in quotation marks? Who is Gautier Benítez? Who is Morel Campos? What does Guamaní represent? What is the tone of the novel?

**Chapter II: The Marriage of Doña Elvira**

Who is Doña Elvira? Who is Don Julio? How did they meet? What is the importance of the song "Maldito amor"? What happened after the marriage of Don Julio and Doña Elvira? How are the women educated? Describe the relationship between Don Julio and Doña Elvira after they move to the country. What is life on the *hacienda* like? What changes does Don Julio make in the running of the *hacienda*? What is the role of women in Puerto Rican society, as presented in this chapter? How does the reader learn about women's lives? How does Doña Elvira die?

**Chapter III: The Consultation**

Who is telling the story and to whom? How do the poor people live? Why does Titina go to see Don Hermenegildo? According to Titina, what did Niño Ubaldino promise her and Néstor and why? What is her version of the family events? How does she present the northerners? How does the

chapter end? Who narrates the last few paragraphs? What is Don Hermenegildo writing and why? How does the narrative voice present Ubaldino?

**Chapter IV: Don Julio's Disenchantment**

What changes take place in Guamaní after Doña Elvira's death? What is the Jones Act of 1917? Why is it relevant to the story? What takes place on April 15, 1918 in Guamaní? Describe the events of that day in detail. Who are Mr. Durham and Mr. Irving? What do Mr. Durham and Mr. Irving mean by the "progress of the 20th century"? Discuss the conflict between the *criollo hacienda* owners and the northerners.

**Chapter V: The Confession**

Who is narrating the story? Why are Arístides and his sisters at their mother's house? What does Arístides plan to do? What has he been doing for the last five years? According to Arístides, what is Don Julio like? Describe Arístides's youth, upbringing, education, and love affair with Gloria. How does Arístides manage the Sweet Diamond mill? How does he portray his mother, father and brother? What events take place when Nicolás returns from Europe? Describe Nicolás's actions. Who was Ponce de León? According to Arístides, why did Nicolás marry Gloria? What happens to Nicolás? Whose child is Nicolasito? Why does Doña Laura want to leave everything to Gloria and Nicolasito? What is Don Hermenegildo's reaction to Arístides's story?

**Chapter VI: The Rescue**

What is the political situation on the island? What happens to Ubaldino after his mother dies? What does Don Julio do with Doña Elvira's sugarcane *hacienda* and mill? How does Ubaldino recover his inheritance? Why is Ubaldino elected senator? Who is narrating? How does he perceive the events narrated?

**Chapter VII: The Oath**

What does Laura relate to Don Hermenegildo about the family? What are Laura 's impressions of the northerners? Why do Ubaldino's aunts reject Laura? What does Laura discover about Don Julio? How does Laura perceive Ubaldino's political life? Define the word *caudillo*. Why does Laura want Gloria to marry Nicolás? According to Laura, how does Arístides treat Gloria and why? What happens with the will at the end?

**Chapter VIII: Homage to Morel Campos**

What does Gloria think of Don Hermenegildo? What is Gloria's version of Ubaldino's accomplishments? According to Gloria, what is her relation-

ship with Nicolás like? What does Gloria do at the end of the story? At the end of the novel the song changes. What does this imply?

**General Questions**

Define the main characteristics of contemporary Puerto Rican literature using *Maldito amor* to support your opinion. Discuss the role of women in Puerto Rican society. What is the importance of language in Puerto Rican culture and society? How does Rosario Ferré portray Puerto Rican society? How is the struggle for independence reflected in the novel? Describe the narrators in the novel. Who is the most credible? Why? Who would probably give the "official" version of the story? If they are equally credible, what does that imply about history?

As additional projects the instructor can design a variety of activities related to the analysis of the novel. One option is to lead class discussion with the following topics: black women, the clash between *criollos* and North Americans, colonization, ethnic identity, family violence, feminist concerns, homosexuality, identity, *machismo*, oppression, politics, racial discrimination, racism, rebellion, relationship between literature and history, sexuality and women's role. Another possible assignment would be to find a definition of parody as well as to research the above mentioned novels and play: *La llamarada, Solar Montoya, Cauce sin río* and *La carreta*, and discuss their contribution to the Puerto Rican narrative and how they have affected the contemporary novelists on the island. Yet another option is to investigate why the novel is considered a *roman a clef* and try to identify the characters and events portrayed with real life people.

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*El medio pollito: Siete cuentos infantiles*. Río Piedras: Huracán, 1976. (7 children 's stories)

*La muñeca menor / The Youngest Doll*. Río Piedras: Huracán, 1980. (bilingual edition of her first short story)

*Sitio a Eros: Trece ensayos literarios*. Mexico, DF: Joaquín Mortiz, 1980. (feminist biographic essays)

*La mona que le pisaron la cola*. Río Piedras: Huracán, 1981. (6 children's stories)

*Los cuentos de Juan Bobo*. Río Piedras: Huracán, 1981. (5 children's stories)

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*Maldito amor*. Mexico, DF: Joaquín Mortiz, 1986. (a novella and 3 short stories)

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# CHANGING THE CANON: INTRODUCTORY LITERATURE COURSES AS STEPPING STONES

*Ann M. Wellington*

> 1 July 1995
> How will I ever be able to return to Nebraska?... Eventually I have to figure out what I will feel comfortable asking my students to read as I attempt to de-anglicize our literature classes. . . .
>
> 16 July 1995
> I guess at some point I better start to try to figure out what I can possibly do with all of this information. What will be palatable for my lit. students? I am sure (?) it will all come together (I think). . . .
>
> 23 July 1995
> I ... cannot believe I don't know what information to put together for my students. At least I know that all of this information is relevant. It is just how to put it together for a semester of sophomores . . . .

If I were to share with you my journal entries from the CCHA/NEH Summer Institute, "Latin American Literatures: Self and Society," they would all read much the same way. Amid the flurry of my own learning, I trusted the process to somehow work itself out for me later so I could share the fruits of this learning with my students.

I went into the Institute expecting to learn enough to return to my community college in Nebraska and "de-anglicize" our Introductory Literature courses. I came out of the Institute panicked and suffering from information overload; because all of the information was so valuable, I wanted to somehow impart to my students EVERYTHING I had learned. The amount of information, however, was not the problem. (A little information, in this case, would not be a dangerous thing.) The source of the panic stemmed from having only two weeks to put together a course calendar for Modern Fiction, a class I had never taught, and incorporating some of my recent learning into it.

I used our five week experience in San Diego as a springboard, concentrating on questions that we had focused on there. I have included those as parts of the course calendar to show the progression of the class's thought processes throughout the semester. When I was planning this

course calendar I knew I wanted to teach *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (a book some would label "untraditional"), but knew I could not ask my students to read begin with such a complex text. So I started the semester by presenting them with what they would consider "untraditional" literature. We read Julio Cortázar's "Night Face Up." In this story we were confronted with two very "real" realities. The reader cannot determine which is more real. It was the perfect way to start out a semester in which all of the subsequent literature would ask us to examine what reality is, how we use language to define it, how we view time and community, and why we view them as we do. Once students had been focusing on these types of questions for 10 weeks, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* would not be daunting.

I attempted to arrange the pieces from least "untraditional" to most "untraditional". The arrangement seems to have worked. On our first day with *One Hundred Years of Solitude* the students told me that it was not that difficult to read; they thought it would be much more difficult than it actually was. I even had a student thank me for assigning the book. And when I walked into class on the first day we were to discuss *After the Bombs*, I was greeted with, "I know why we are reading this book last; it contains everything that we have been discussing all semester!" For these students, at least, the canon has changed. They now are just as much at ease with dropping Julio Cortázar's name as they are with dropping William Shakespeare's name.

[This is an abridged version of the syllabus that I used for the semester. I have put in boldface what I feel are the most important parts of it: the description of the course, the course objectives and the evaluation of achievement.]

English 205

**COURSE SYLLABUS**
Department: Humanities
Course: English 205
Title: Modern Fiction

I. Required Texts

*The Heath Introduction to Fiction*, 4th edition
*After the Bombs*, Arturo Arias
*The Awakening*, Kate Chopin
*Beloved*, Toni Morrison
*Black Boy*, Richard Wright

*The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald
*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Gabriel García Márquez

II. Prerequisites: English 108 (Comp I) with passing grade of C or better, or permission of instructor.

III. Description of Course

**English 205 is designed to introduce students to major literary movements and trends in the late 19th and 20th century short fiction and novel. By employing critical reading and thinking skills, students will understand literature more fully, and as a result will better understand their identities in the world.**

**Class time will involve discussion, small group work and some short lectures. I expect lively discussion and consistent completion of the reading assignments. Students also will respond to the literature through both informal and formal writing assignments.**

IV. Units and Contents

A. Novel
B. Short Story

V. Course Objectives

**A. Students will learn the fundamentals of literary study and will gain a sense of how literature contributes to the world of ideas.**
**B. Students will gain confidence in their abilities to read and respond to literature through discussion and writing.**
**C. Students will become familiar with a number of important fiction writers.**
**D. Students will gain an appreciation for the multicultural nature of literary art and will gain a sense of global literary tradition.**
**E. Students will learn more about their own identities while analyzing the identities of literary characters.**

[What follows is the annotated course calendar I used for the Fall semester, 1995. I have put in bold the names of the works which I included as a result of my participation in the Summer Institute. Some of the readings came from *The Heath Introduction to Fiction*, others I photocopied from various sources. For most photocopied pieces I have included the date of first publication and title of work in which they were first pub-

lished. All of the Cortázar pieces can be found in English in *Blowup and Other Short Stories*. The annotations following most pieces can be divided into 3 categories: questions addressed to students (??), notes for instructors (N) and class activities (A)].

*= *one page reader response due on that day about that work*

Tuesday, August 22

**"The Night Face Up"** (In *Final del Juego*, 1964) by Julio Cortázar (Argentina)

**?? What is "real"? What is "not real"? What function does time have?**

**A Have students "prove" which scenario is the real/not real one. They will discover that there is no definitive answer. Reality is a matter of perception.**

**?? What leads us to the conclusions/beliefs we have in life? Does society/community affect our decisions/beliefs/ conclusions?**

Thursday, August 24

"A Rose for Emily" (1930) by William Faulkner (United States)

**?? Is the narrative perspective biased? How does community affect perception? What does "community" mean? Characterize "community." How "sane" is Emily? How do we determine her sanity? From what assumptions are we working? Does Emily think "logically"? How would a court respond to Emily's actions? What does the title mean? From whom is the rose?**

Tuesday, August 29

"The Youngest Doll" (In *The Youngest Doll and Other Stories*, 1991) by Rosario Ferré (Puerto Rico)

**?? What is community? How does the community view this family? How has that affected this family? Is the aunt a "good" person? What leads us (as individuals) to these conclusions ? Could the aunt actually be giving her "life" in the prawns? How selfless is that? Or was she just getting back at the doctor?**

**N Note that "youngest" is a *human* term to describe *doll* (something non-human). Our comfortable binaries are being destroyed. Also the aunt sends *away* to Europe for the eyes yet baptizes them with *nature* before using them. (Is she exorcising them?)**

"Adj. Inc." (In *Reclaiming Medusa*, 1988) by Ana Lydia Vega (Puerto Rico)

**?? Who are the oppressed? Who is the oppressor?**
**N Things are not always as they appear; reality is not clear cut. Look at the narrative technique. The plot is uncovered as we read words on papers in a file (until we see the man at the end of the story).**
**?? What is language capable of reflecting? How close to reality/experience is the language we use to describe it? How "true"/"real" is language?**

Thursday, August 31

*"A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (1955) by Flannery O'Connor (United States)
**?? Is the grandmother a "good" person? What are her beliefs? Is the Misfit a "good" person? What are his beliefs? Could the grandmother's death actually have saved her?**
"Sweat" (1926) by Zora Neale Hurston (African-America)
**A After discussing the story for awhile, I split the class into two groups. One group will "prove" Delia is innocent of murder, the other group will "prove" she is guilty of murder. (I try to put the students into the opposite group toward which they were leaning during the preceding discussion.) Students must use evidence from the story to prove their contentions. Each group will present its "case" and counter-argue points raised. Conclusion: "Reality" is not black and white; it is gray.**

Thursday, September 7

*The Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin (United States)
Chapters 1-14
**?? Characterize Robert, Edna, Mr. Montpellier and the people vacationing with them**
*"The Looking Glass" (In *The Briar Cliff Review*, 1988) by Ann Ritt (United States)
**N This one-page piece is written in stream-of-consciousness. We are in the mind of a young woman in an asylum. This type of reading/deciphering will prepare us for use of language in later works.**

Tuesday, September 12

*The Awakening* Chapter 15-29
**?? How is Edna changing? Is she a "good" mother? Is she a "good" wife? Is Mr. Montpellier a "good" husband?**

Thursday, September 14

*The Awakening* Chapters 30–39

**?? Can we, as readers, accept Edna's decision? Is it "natural"? Why are we angry that Edna did not end up with Robert?**

**N The conclusion does not match our desire for "happily ever after" endings. The story does not end the way we want it to end. Often we come to literature wanting the stories to be told OUR way, so we can feel comfortable.**

**?? Do we maintain similar attitudes in our daily lives?**

*"Gooseberries" (1898) by Anton Chekov (Russia)

Tuesday, September 19

*The Great Gatsby* (1925) by F. Scott Fitzgerald (United States) Chapters 1–3

**?? How reliable is the narrator? Is he biased? Do we know more about Gatsby or about Nick? Characterize the society presented so far. What draws people together? How is community formed?**

*"About Love" (1898) by Anton Chekov (Russia)

Thursday, September 21

*The Great Gatsby* Chapters 4–5

Tuesday, September 26

*The Great Gatsby* Chapters 6–7

Thursday, September 28

**The Great Gatsby* Chapters 8–9

**?? Why we are upset that Daisy and Gatsby do not end up together? Do people in "real" life always live happily ever after?**

**N It does not match our expectations for reality. We want everyone to live happily ever after but that is not "real." Examine unresolvable paradoxes presented throughout novel (once again our comfortable assumptions are destroyed):**

**East is good, west bad.**

**Green is artificial, is a dream.**

**Heresy is truth; people view gossip as gospel truth.**

**Death brings life to Daisy/Tom and Nick.**

Tuesday, October 3

Watch film *The Great Gatsby*

FIRST PAPER DUE

Thursday, October 5

*Black Boy* (1945) by Richard Wright (African America)
Chapters 1–2
**?? When was the book written? How accurate can Wright's memory be when he writes of events which occurred when he was 4 years old? Examine Richard's reactions/feelings/ definitions of community. What is "community" in the United States? With whose language do we define it? From whose language does the title of the book come?**

Tuesday, October 10

*Black Boy* Chapters 3–6

Thursday, October 12

*Black Boy* Chapters 7–14
**A I enter the classroom and speak to the students in Spanish. I use student names, am animated, give instructions, etc.**
**I allow frustration to rise, then ask (in English) the students to write for 5 minutes about how they feel. I then ask them to share what they have written. They end up reacting in all the ways Richard Wright did in the book:**
**-anger. "How dare she throw something different into class?"**
**-denial. "Oh well. After class I have to remember to pick up that photography book that I need. I hope my car starts!"**
**-frustration. "I know she wants an answer but I don't know what to say! I cannot understand what she is doing!!"**
**-frustration/defeat. "I can't understand her! What is she doing? Oh well. I'm not worth it; I can't understand."**
**-violent frustration. "Stop! Stop it! Someone stop her!!" with hands over his/her ears .**
**I disrupted their already established community by introducing another language. Community is based on an agreed upon language. Have students look at specific examples: use of "nigger" is acceptable in some circles, Black English is acceptable in some circles. Conclusion: there are different cultures within a community**
**N Richard is attracted to language from his youth to his young adulthood; he knows the power of language. Stories use language. Are they powerful?**

Tuesday, October 17

*"I Stand Here Ironing" (1961) by Tillie Olsen (United States)
**?? Who "presses" whom in society/community? Who in society**

**is like the mother with the iron and the dress? Is it "real" not to have wrinkles? Why do we need to get rid of them? Why does the mother seek to get rid of her guilt?**
**N This story is not told chronologically. "Deciphering" it is good practice for some subsequent works.**
"The Lesson" (1972) by Toni Cade Bambara (African-America)

Thursday, October 19

"The Lottery" (1949) by Shirley Jackson (United States)
**N Look at the presumptions people make without thinking. Look at the setting. It is naked of any certainty. It can be anywhere, and is. We, like the members of the community, are comfortable with what is happening as the story unfolds. But we revolt at the end of the story.**
**?? Why do we revolt when we discover what happens to the "winner" of the lottery? If we had grown up with this ritual would we feel differently? What is individuality? Where does it come from? Does it exist? Can we truly have it?**
**N Discuss B.F. Skinner and his theory that none of our decisions are our own.**
***"Letter to a Young Lady in Paris"** (In *Bestiario*, 1951) by Julio Cortázar (Argentina)
**?? Are the bunnies "real"? Does it matter if they are?**
**N Look at the narrator's inability to deal with another's order of things. He was comfortable in his own chaos; it was a sort of order for him. Someone else's ideas of order, however, threw off the equilibrium he had created.**
**?? Is the narrator "ready" to die? Why is the letter so long?**
**N At the end of the story the narrator is not thinking about not being around anymore, but rather the school kids and the body. As readers of fiction do we share some traits with the narrator?**

Tuesday, October 24

*"The Jilting of Granny Weatherall" (1930) by Katherine Anne Porter (United States)
**N This story, like "The Looking Glass," is not told in chronological order. Reality and time are just illusions we create to make us more comfortable.**
**?? Do people really think in a linear fashion? Why are we so angry with Porter for reflecting "reality"?**
**N Examine the function of religion. Students are uncomfortable with admitting Granny's religion is hollow.**

**?? Does Granny rely on religion or on herself? Granny yells one last time for a sign from God and does not get one. Do we have similar expectations of literature? Why?**

*"The Yellow Wall-paper" (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (United States)

**?? How "mad" is the woman? Is she "mad" to rid herself of the insanity of society? Is she more free at the end of the story than she was at the beginning of it? Is John a "good" or a " bad" husband? What assumptions lead us to these conclusions?**

**N The narrator forces us to make judgments since she cannot. Many narrators act as if they know all. Reading always involves bringing ourselves to the work and making judgments. What do our judgments say about us?**

Thursday, October 26

*Beloved*, (1987) by Toni Morrison (African-America), pages 3–85

**N Look at time; examine how shifts are seamlessly presented to us. Isn't that how our minds work all the time? As in *Black Boy*, time is relative. Narrative technique has to be the way it is. There is no other "real" way to reflect the blending of past, present and future.**

Tuesday, October 31

*Beloved*, pages 86–165

Thursday, November 2

*Beloved*, pages 169–275

**?? Examine community. When is community "community"?**

**N We see "true" community in the bottom of a slave boat toward the end of the novel. In this chapter we are one and individuals at the same time. We have different feelings but the same feelings. We admire one another ("teeth"). The feeling is beyond happy or sad surface emotion; it is a "hot thing." Adult Beloved—fondly referred to as BB (Big Beloved) in our class—encapsulates all. She wraps the present with the past and the future.**

**?? Who best handles the past?**

**N Sethe's way does not succeed. Baby Sugg's way does not succeed. The "community's" way does not succeed. Halle's way does not succeed. The Garners' way does not succeed. Ella's**

**way does not succeed (she doesn't see Beloved at the front of the house). Denver succeeds. She ventures into the community, recognizes "the other" and succeeds.**

**?? Since Morrison is writing more than 100 years after slavery ends, what can she "know" about the experience? We like to think she cannot write "knowledgeably" about something that happened such a long time ago. But is the past really that far removed from us today? What is the origin of our beliefs? We are taught farting is bad, shit is bad, etc. But do we really make our own decisions??? (B.F. Skinner)**

**N In some cultures sneezing is viewed in the same light in which we in this country view farting. Try to get students to recognize their own absolute, black or white beliefs; introduce them to gray. Also introduce the dangers of gray. For example, the colors of Baby Suggs are between the extremes of white and black; how successful is she with gray?**

**?? Throughout the novel we see many "new births," but how "new" are they? In what ways does this remind you of "The Lottery"?**

**N Look at sex, 28 day cycle, breaking of water, blood in shed used to shelter wood that has been cut from its "mother." Sex is an important motif in the final two novels of the semester.**

Tuesday, November 7

***"Bestiary"** (In *Bestiario*, 1951) by Julio Cortázar (Argentina)

**N Begin introducing the mythical, the magical, to prepare for *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.**

**?? Is the tiger "real"? Does it matter?**

**N The tiger is real to the characters, real enough to kill someone.**

**?? What is growing up? acknowledgment, participation in death? Describe the family relations in this story. Why are they difficult to decipher? What function does the letter writing have?**

**"House Taken Over"** (In *Bestiario*, 1951) by Julio Cortázar (Argentina)

**?? Examine the reactions of the two main characters. Are we ever guilty of the same behavior when we read? in our daily lives?**

**N One character throws the key in the sewer and the other drops her knitting. Both refuse to deal with the gray between the two worlds. Rather than investigating, examining "the other," they leave, get rid of, ignore and distrust.**

"The Enduring Chill" (In *Everything That Rises Must Converge*, 1958) by Flannery O'Connor (United States)
"The Mark on the Wall" (In *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories*, 1944) by Virginia Woolf (England)
SECOND PAPER DUE

Thursday, November 9
***100 Years of Solitude*** (1967) by Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia) pages 1-81
**?? What facts did you learn in each chapter? Who is related to whom? How? What incidents have occurred? In what time frame did they occur?**

Tuesday, November 14
***100 Years of Solitude***, pages 82–164

Thursday, November 16
***100 Years of Solitude***, pages 165–249

Tuesday, November 21
***100 Years of Solitude***, pages 250–338
Tuesday, November 28
******100 Years of Solitude***, pages 339–422
**IDENTITY**
**?? What is family? What is community? What is "the great sin"? incest? killing the indigenous population? industry? How do family/community/public/private connect? Is identity tied to race?**
**N As Macondo is founded identity is lost. Caribbeans do not discuss, acknowledge, differences in race. Race seems to be suppressed in this novel. (In Dominican Republic there are 52 words which replace "Negro").**

**HISTORY**
**?? What is "history"?**
**N Discuss "official" vs. "real" history. Real history disappears as official history is created by "the other," (the government). In 1928 there was a protest waged against United Fruit Company. The army said 200 died; others say 3,000 died. Discuss the negotiation of oral culture and print culture and tie it to the power of language.**
**?? How is time dealt with in the novel?**

**N There is no present in the novel; only the past and future are present, so history is destroyed. It is language/linguistics that determines sense of time/no time.**

**LANGUAGE**

**?? Some critics believe that this is the story of Genesis for Latin America. Do you agree or disagree? Why? Why would the author use an exaggerated style if he were writing a "Bible"? Who tells the story? Who recuperates it?**

**N This book creates a new myth of creation to give new life to Latin America. It, however, is a master narrative that deconstructs the idea of a master narrative. The reader is the one who tells the story and who recuperates it, deciphers it, via language. This is a book about reading and interpreting the world. With it our inadequacies as readers are challenged. We look to the past to reveal a collective truth. Magical realism, like the "grotesque" in Flannery O'Connor's works, leads to an intellectual impasse. We can't analyze any more; reason becomes useless. Is that the essence of literature?**

**BINARIES**

**N Examine the following binaries:**
**—mythical vs. logical world**
**—explanations within and outside history**
**—representations of physicality and intellectualism**
**—women who disengage from the physical (Amaranta) and women who embrace the physical (prostitutes)**
**—approval and denial**
**—scientific knowledge and intuition**
**—exile and journey**
**—community (sameness) and "the other"**

Thursday, November 30
*After the Bombs* (1979) by Arturo Arias (Guatemala)
Chapters 1–3

Tuesday, December 5
*After the Bombs* Chapters 4–5

Thursday, December 7
**After the Bombs* Chapters 6–7

**COMMUNITY**

**?? What is community? What disrupts community? What are one's responsibility to community?**

**N Note that the prostitutes are the only people *we see fighting* for freedom from an oppressive and corrupt government. They take what makes them succeed in their "careers" (action, not passivity) and apply it to the outside world to bring about a positive change. No one else in the community is willing to do this.**

**?? What are the roles of children? adults? Why are their roles different? Do they have to be? Does country = community? How do we tell "right" from "wrong"? Does time play a role in how we distinguish the two?**

**LANGUAGE**

**?? Describe Max's journey to discover the power of language.**

**N Max comes to terms with self as he comes to terms with language. The culture of fear prevents people from naming things; the "enemy," those who govern, know the power of language. This is why the books are empty. Without language, there is no way to name society/self, and as a result, no way to act/react to what is happening in the world. (In Guatemala there are no bumper stickers. People are afraid to let others know where they stand.) Language creates meaning/truth. If you are not self critical/reflective you cannot grow.**

**?? Explain how Max's exile is his freedom. According to the author, humor is a fundamental means to fight authority. Do you agree or disagree? Why?**

THIRD PAPER DUE

[The following are the instructions for the formal papers and final exam for Modern Fiction. I gave the instructions for the papers to the students one week before the papers were due. It was necessary to remind them of the difference between informal reader responses and formal argumentative papers.]

**Modern Fiction**
**Instructions for Paper 1**

Choose ONE of the following topics and write a 3–5 page paper. Your paper must be typed and double-spaced. Be sure to title your essay. It

may be helpful to review the section from Heath which deals with analytical writing as well as the handout I gave you on this subject.

1. Explain how the setting of the story reveals the theme of the story.

| | |
|---|---|
| *The Awakening* | "The Youngest Doll" |
| *The Great Gatsby* | "About Love" |
| "A Rose for Emily" | "Gooseberries" |

2. Compare or contrast two characters from two of the works listed below:

| | |
|---|---|
| "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" | "The Looking Glass" |
| "A Rose for Emily" | "The Night Face Up" |
| "Adj. Inc." | *The Awakening* |
| "Sweat" | *The Great Gatsby* |

3. Discuss the theme of any of the works we have read thus far.

4. Write an analytical paper which deals with one or more of the works we have read thus far.

**Modern Fiction**
**Instructions for Paper 2**

Examine the aspect/function of time in any of the works we have read thus far this semester. (Note: you ***may*** choose to deal with more than one work.)

Some helpful questions to get started:

> How does the author use time? Why does the author do this? How do the characters view time? Is the narrative technique related to the perceptions of the characters? What message about time is sent to the reader?

Do not, however, examine the work(s) you analyzed for the first paper. Be sure to use evidence from the work(s) to support your contentions. Remember to keep the tone formal.

Your paper should be 3–5 pages in length and should be typed and double spaced with one-inch margins.

**Modern Fiction**
**Instructions for Paper 3**

Respond to one of the following quotations. Either agree or disagree with what the person has said. Use evidence from the works we have read this

semester to support your contentions. Remember that this 3-5 page FORMAL paper must be typed.

> 1) "The value of great fiction, we begin to suspect, is not that it entertains us or distracts us from our troubles, not just that it broadens our knowledge of people and places, but also that it helps us to know what we believe, reinforces the qualities that are noblest in us, leads us to feel uneasy about our failures and limitations."
>
> John Gardner

> 2) "The art of reading is in great part that of acquiring a better understanding of life from one's encounter with it in a book."
>
> Andre Maurois

> 3) "Only the [person] who is wide awake is capable of enjoying a book, of extracting from it what is vital. Such a [person] enjoys whatever comes into [his or her] experience and, unless I am horribly mistaken, makes no distinction between the experiences offered through reading and the manifold experiences of everyday life."
>
> Henry Miller

> 4) "In a very real sense, people who have read good literature have lived more than people who cannot or will not read . . . . It is not true that we have only one life to live; if we can read, we can live as many more lives and as many kinds of lives as we wish."
>
> S. I. Hayakawa

[I gave the students the instructions for the final exam four weeks before the day of the test. I told them that we would not discuss "An Unwritten Novel" in class. In that way I was able to test the students' abilities to read as well as their abilities to write and to analyze.]

**Modern Fiction**
**Instructions for in-class final**

Read "An Unwritten Novel" (In A *Haunted House and Other Short Stories*, 1944) by Virginia Woolf (England) before the day of our final. Use it and other works, notes, to comment on any of the major literary issues we have discussed in class.

identity
"reality"
time
community
writerly techniques and readerly techniques
the language of memory

Be sure to use evidence from the work(s) to support your contentions. You will have two hours to write and revise this essay in class.

# MULTIPLE REALITIES IN MARIO VARGAS LLOSA'S *THE STORYTELLER*

*Diane Kamali*

> Here speaks the storyteller, telling by voice what was learned by ear. Here speaks a poet who did not learn language structure from one teacher and language meaning from another, nor plot structure from one and characterization from another, nor even an art of storytelling from one and an art of hermeneutics from another, but always heard all these things working together in the stories of other storytellers. (Tedlock 3)

*The Storyteller (El Hablador)*, by Vargas Llosa, represents an awareness of the diverse, multilayered, simultaneous nature of human perception and of the ability of fiction to provide a pathway to this multifaceted reality. Because of this, it is a treasure-trove for teaching.

The story opens with a young Peruvian writer who has come from the land where, legend had it, Dante first had his imagination captivated by his Beatrice. This writer, who is also our narrator, is visiting Firenze in search of solitude, hoping "to forget Peru and the Peruvians"(3), to read Dante and Machiavelli, and to look at Renaissance paintings. Suddenly and unexpectedly, he has his memory brought to his present reality by an exhibit of photographs of the Machiguenga tribe, whom he had visited some years earlier. In the midst of these tribal people—in fact the focus of their attention—appears the partially shadowed figure that the writer takes to be a storyteller, a Tsurinchi. The gallery keeper informs the writer that the Italian photographer is dead, so the writer-narrator is free to determine what the photographs reveal, whether or not the central figure is his former classmate Saul Zuratas.

Just this brief opening surrounds us, the readers, with multiple realities. We have the writer-narrator trying to distance himself from his Peruvian identity; we have his history (the visit to the Amazon jungle tribes) entering his present; we have Dante's captivation paralleling our writer's; we have the artist's work (the photographer) taking on a life beyond that of its creator and the artist's death giving added authority to the work's interpretation by its audience; we have the Machiguengas' isolated ancient lives set among the tourist-crowded streets of contemporary Firenze, a city which exists in the present because of the value perceived by others in its past. And we have Vargas Llosa, the hidden author, using his persona of writer-narrator, placing us in the center of this modern (or

post-modern, depending on your perception) word-picture experience, challenging us to question reality, or, more likely, to add to our own realities.

The second chapter introduces Saul Zuratas, perhaps another less obvious Vargas Llosa *persona*. Saul is "open," "altruistic," "uncomplicated," and "exceptionally good," a living "archangel." Through such a character, the author might approach and penetrate life's barriers without hesitancy, except that he has given this character a physical disfigurement. A birthmark, which covers half of his face, has earned him the nickname, "Mascarita," or "Mask Face." Saul, who is half creole and half European—these two strains bearing with them Christianity and Judaism, respectively—has spent many hours in the synagogue listening but "not understanding one word" (9); he neither believes in God nor the Chosen people while attending the university with the writer-narrator. Saul's freedom from belonging to just one group or one belief system makes him an ideal bridge character; in addition, his ostracization due to his birthmark opens a pathway to understanding others who are pressed by the mainstream to remain unseen. Mascarita's "conversion," not to a religion but to preserving Amazonian culture and the forests that shelter it, allows Vargas Llosa to take us inside this culture through Mascarita, to see his view of its reality.

These two opening chapters also raise key questions that will thread their ways throughout the story: What is to be done with the indigenous populations of Peru? Should the Summer Institute of Linguistics (the Wycliff Bible group) or any missionary groups be working among the Indian populations? What is the place of the ancient within the modern, or should it be the modern within the ancient? Who, where, and what is 'the Other?' Who speaks to/for a community? What is the role of art in history, culture, politics? Can or should any culture, religion, time period, school of thought, be pure? How do we form metaphors and what impact do they have on our perception or creation of reality? What is reality? And, of course, who is a storyteller and what role does a storyteller play in society? Questions such as these show how this work opens up possibilities for teaching critical thinking, but more on this later.

In Vargas Llosa's efforts to create "totalizing" novels, that is, novels that explore many aspects of reality, he has been shown to use multiple narrators, to mix past and present time, and to show both micro- and macrocosmic views (Foster and Foster 405). Most critical discussions of *The Storyteller* offer a dualistic interpretation: the writer-narrator as Vargas Llosa's *persona* and Saul as fictional creation. The idea that Saul is also a *persona* for the author does not appear to have been explored. Saul, like the writer-narrator and like Vargas Llosa himself, lives as a wordsmith

and weaver of metaphor. His voice is also an "I" in the story, speaking directly to us. Like the author, Saul is also Peruvian yet is also 'the Other.' Rather than see this as a negative, Vargas Llosa portrays it as an asset that allows a wider spectrum of light in viewing identity.

Vargas Llosa says of his own background, "... my idea of Peru as a boy was distorted and restricted. I suppose this was more or less the experience of most Peruvians. Everybody lived secluded in a small world of his own with practically a total ignorance of what life was for other Peruvians" (Lichtblau 41). Ironically, it was while outside his country that Vargas Llosa learned about Peru. While attending college in France, Vargas Llosa tells of being entranced by his history teacher's telling of the story of the conquest of Peru (Latin Amer. 2–3). In addition, much of Vargas Llosa's literary influence was European, especially French, so intellectually he also became 'the Other.' In *The Storyteller*, the writer-narrator tells us that he is telling Saul's story (35); however, the Tasurinchi's tales to the Machiguenga are not observed by the writer-narrator, so they exist either or both as his fictional creation of what these stories must have been and/or as the creation of Vargas Llosa, the hidden author. This reinforces the possibility that each *persona* represents sources that Vargas Llosa listens to and speaks through. Lucille Kerr gives us an idea of the complexity of what she describes as a dual narrator—the traditional and the modern storyteller—each of which she says appears "...to mask and to uncover the other:"

> The dramatized author's voice is heard as that of a particular individual whom readers may be tempted to identify as Vargas Llosa himself. However, that voice is also exposed as but the echo, and the authorial face as but the specular figure, of the traditional (and unidentifiable) teller or speaker of stories named in its title. Moreover, the titular figure's performance suggests that the traditional storyteller is the voice not only of a cultural collectivity but also of an individual entity who becomes audible, if not altogether visible, in Vargas Llosa's novel. (135)

Much has been written about the dualistic presentation seen in this novel, and Vargas Llosa, in discussing another of his works, *Historia de Mayta*, indicated that he had consciously created two levels of description. He created what he called the "objective level in which a narrator, someone who would have my name but only to misguide the reader once again, would try to collect material to write a novel about what had happened and how it had happened..." He calls this the "fake objective

level." The other level is the imaginary level, which would allow his readers to watch the construction of a piece of fiction:

> The reader would see this writer using what he knows, what he reads, what he hears, and what he discovers in objective reality as material out of which his fantasy and imagination construct a fiction, something that is not a reflection, not a totally separate reality (because this new reality is using this material all the time), but something that little by little becomes very different or rather essentially different from what the objective source of the fiction is. So the whole novel would be a continuous confrontation between these two dimensions, or faces of one process that would have as protagonist the writer himself, the mind of the writer. (Lichtblau 152)

In examining *The Storyteller*, Castro-Klaren speaks of two aspects of narration (209). Cruz also sees the *hablador* (native voice) and the western writer, as portrayed by Mascarita/Saul and the writer-narrator respectively, in dualistic terms. Though we can see these dual levels at work in *The Storyteller*, it appears that Vargas Llosa has multiplied these levels. We have Tasurinchi, the Machiguenga term for their storytellers, thus creating a simultaneously individual yet multiple narrator, each of whom is a combination muse and storyteller who sees in all about him stories and connections. We have Mascarita, who brings to his function of Tasurinchi threads of experience from outside the tribe and whose disfigured existence goes counter to the long held beliefs of the tribe he speaks for; and we have Saul, a university student of ethnography. All of these—the individual and the universal Tasurinchi, Mascarita, and Saul—are embodied in one character, but this "oneness" is the paradoxical aspect of "one," which is both one as separate and unique and one as all-encompassing. In addition, we have the writer-narrator, a Euro-Peruvian, who wants to tell Mascarita's story. And, of course, we have the author, Vargas Llosa, who created and is all of these. Dualistic is much too limited a label for any aspect of this work.

The three primary aspects of storyteller (writer-narrator, oral storyteller, and hidden author) speak from their respective realities to whomever will listen, perhaps in the hope that the listening will lead to change (or as the Machiguenga would say, to "walking"), which in turn will preserve life. Such is the belief of the Machiguenga in this tale, and such is also the idea of Vargas Llosa, who says he agrees with Sartre that literature should not be used to escape from contemporary problems nor purely to entertain, but should be a voice for change (Lichtblau 49; Filer

117). In an interview with Sklodowska, Vargas Llosa said,

> A book never solves immediate problems. The way in which a book contributes to change is indirect: a book makes people more aware of the problems of the world and more apt to understand their responsibility in what is going on. Change comes through the people whose consciousness has been enriched by books, and you can neither measure nor control this process. In many cases, the effects of what you write are completely opposite to what you intended." (136)

The idea that one can neither control nor predict the effect of an idea, an image, or a story relates to the dilemma over determining the appropriateness and predicting the impact of cultural and other intrusions. Certainly plenty of "intrusions" are represented in this novel. We have the Wycliff Bible people, using the name of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, recording for the first time the oral languages of the indigenous peoples and thus preserving them for others while at the same time using their knowledge of the language to teach the Bible printed in Machiguenga or Quechua. There is the Spanish conquest of Peru, the intrusion of Catholicism, and the coffee barons' intrusion into the countryside. Further intrusions occur as the writer-narrator investigates and writes about Saul's life and about the Machiguenga. We also have the anthropologists' intrusion and the intrusion by Vargas Llosa himself into the native cultures. Though each of these intrusions occurred for a specific purpose, their immediate and long-terms effects cannot be measured or controlled, nor can an absolute rightness or wrongness be determined as both negative and positive effects are created.

An example of the kind of debate one might find over such intrusion occurs over Saul as Tasurinchi or storyteller. One critic, Maria Cruz, sees Saul's participation in the Machiguenga community as interfering in the Machiguenga culture by weaving "Kafka and the Bible as subtexts in his last story" (136). Castro-Klaren raises her doubts about whether we should accept Saul's tales since is he isn't an "authentic keeper of the tribe's beliefs and traditions" (209). However, in storytelling traditions in general, the weaving in of the storyteller's own reality and experience reaffirms being part of the whole. Cultures are not static. As Castro-Klaren herself notes, "...myth is not the fossilized reason of the primitive past" (214). We see that the Machiguenga have woven into their oral history, their stories, the contact with the rubber growers and the foreign woman they have captured; these are both indicators of how cultures incorporate and redefine experience. According to Del Carmen

Prodoscimi, both the "Jewish *hablador*" wandering in the wilderness and the Peruvian writer wandering in Europe represent "two Peruvian mindsets about the fate of Amazonia" (23). But more than this, these figures represent a search for the Other in oneself.

In order to overcome those limits which make it difficult for us to accept the Other, Luis Villoro, in his article in the *Discovering the Americas* series, says that we would have to accept a picture of the world which is radically different from our own. We would need to accept "that reason is not one but many; that truth and meaning are not discovered from a privileged point of view...[but]...can be understood from different paradigms." To achieve this, Villoro says,

> One would have to break up with the idea of the whole European history that the historical world has a center. In a plural world, any subject is the center....Recognizing the validity of the equal and different from us, is giving up every previous idea of domination; it is losing the fear of discovering ourselves, equal and diverse, in the look of the other. [Villoro believes]...only this step would allow banishing forever the danger of the destruction of man by man, only this change would permit raising human history to a higher level. (16)

To achieve an understanding of the Other, to see ourselves in that Other and the Other in us, to create new realities, we must be both listeners and speakers, and we must share our stories. The function of Vargas Llosa's story is to be passed on, in part or in full, to a variety of audiences who will see in it a number of realities, which in turn will affect the realities in which these listeners-readers-speakers move. To that end, I will propose a number of possible ways to approach and explore this work in college courses, never doubting that my readers and colleagues will clearly see avenues I have not yet found.

**Exploring Vargas Llosa's references to other realities in *The Storyteller*: Suggestions for Assignments**

The following can be assigned as paired or small group collaborations culminating in presentations to the large group, or they may be considered as individual paper topics. When appropriate, subject areas other than literature which might use *The Storyteller* and the assignments suggested have been indicated in parentheses. Information on suggested texts can be found in "Works Consulted."

1. Read Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. Why do you think Vargas Llosa chose this work as Saul's reference point?
2. Explore the religious references in this work: The Tower of Babel, Saul, the lost tribe, the Chosen people, and others. What light does knowledge of these stories shed on Vargas Llosa's tale? (Bible as Literature)
3. Look into the history of the conquest of Peru. In particular follow the impact on the native populations. How does this knowledge affect your reading of *The Storyteller*? (Hist. of Lat. Am.)
4. Examine Vargas Llosa's career. Look at his education, his life experiences, and his political views (notice changes in the latter). In what ways does this biographical information contribute to your understanding of this text?
5. At first glance, gender issues appear non-existent in this work, but look more closely. How do the Tasurinchi's stories reveal and question the traditional role of women among the Machiguenga? What does the absence of women storytellers say to you? To pursue this in more depth, consider Ong's observation (159-160). Then ask yourself if we might expect a difference in written form from women who come from an oral tradition that included female storytellers? (Women's Studies)
6. Look up anthropological studies of the Machiguenga peoples. Some of this material will have been collected by religious groups. Try to look at more than one description of the culture. What differences do you see in the presentation of the Machiguenga? (Anthropology)
7. Think of a "marginal group" in your own geographic area. Look up information on it. (Do not include a group to which you belong.) Interview someone from that group to find out which of their basic traditions differ from the larger culture around them. How does this knowledge affect you? (Psychology)
8. Read Nochlin's book on realism in art. Note the major characteristics of this period, from 1840-80, sandwiched between Romanticism and Symbolism. Consider whether Vargas Llosa's work is an example of realism and whether it has elements of these other periods also (*i.e.*, is it a "bridge" work?). (Art History)
9. To gain an understanding of the impact of Christianity on the belief systems of original populations and to see some of the myth systems of those populations, look at the following works: MacCormack, Ortiz de Montellano, Salomon, F. (Myth, Religion)
10. Relate the historical context of the time when *The Storyteller* was written to the themes in the story. Consult Skidmore, T., Poole, D. (Contemporary Latin American History)
11. Various "solutions" to the "Indian problem" were considered in Peru as in other countries with native populations: a religious solution

(convert them), leave them alone, put them on reservations (isolation), integrate and acculturate (make them more like mainstream culture), have the mainstream adapt to their ways, destroy them, or save a remnant of the group. How does Vargas Llosa's work present these options? What other countries, including your own, have considered and employed one or more of these options? What contemporary situations might these options be being considered for? (Political Sci., Sociology, Hist.)

12. Explore the role of the storyteller in a variety of societies. Consult the bibliographic references under Gernes, Niane, Goss, Gwaltney, Glidden, Benjamin, Wilson, Miller.
13. Research the change from oral to written storytelling; then consider the change we are in now, from written text to media. For example, Benjamin (83) links the demise of the storyteller with the devaluation of personal experience. He also discusses the parallel between the development of the modern period with its media and its wars to the disappearance of exchanging of experience. Walter Ong tells us "Present-day de-plotted narrative forms are part of the electronic age, deviously structured in abstruse codes (like computers)" (159). Describe what future "story" forms might be like.
14. Read Vargas Llosa's *Aunt Julia and the Script-writer*. What similarities stand out in the writer's technique. What differences strike you?
15. Examine the "Other" in Vargas Llosa's *The Storyteller*. Then read Julio Cortázar's short story," The Axolotl." Discuss similarities and differences in the themes.
16. Watch the film *Faces of the Enemy* (Bill Jersey Productions, 1987) on the creation of the Other. Relate to Vargas Llosa's description of the paradox of Otherness.

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# LATIN AMERICAN FICTION IN SUPPORT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES COURSES: A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF TEXTS

*Kay Gerard*

## INTRODUCTION

It was my good fortune to participate in a National Endowment for the Humanities Institute, "Latin American Literatures and Cultures: Self and Society" in July, 1995. The experience reaffirmed my belief that the use of fiction allows students to more fully understand and apply historical, psychological and sociological theory. "History, geography, sociology are just as much a part of the study of this literature as poetic technique or novelistic structure," writes Jean Franco in *An Introduction To Spanish-American Literature*. In fact, much Latin American literature is now available in English translation and provides us with many opportunities for interdisciplinary explorations.

Theories and concepts of self, social class, race, ethnicity and economic power come to life in Latin American fiction. First, Latin American writers provide numerous and varied regional and national perspectives. Writers such as Arguedas, Carpentier, Ferre, Queiros and Ramos provide a fictional context for applying sociological concepts of racial, cultural and class-based social hierarchies. Many of the authors cited here focus on the complex and ever-shifting web of social, cultural and psychological influences on individual identities forged within powerful social structures based on class, race, and gender. The anthologies edited by Erro-Peralta and Velez are examples, as are works of Galeano and Andrade. Through the works of these authors, there are opportunities for the reader to view individuals and societies through fictional lenses and to gain understanding of the influence of colonialism, past and present. In addition, the narratives of authors such as Arguedas and Asturias express the complex dynamics and the significance of European and indigenous interactions. Attention to the dynamics of power in historical events and a consideration of the social domination of economically based political structures characterizes many of the works.

This is a selected bibliography of fiction. The works cited are available in English translation and are recommended for community college and university undergraduate libraries in support of courses in literature as well as in interdisciplinary courses in the humanities and social sciences. This is not intended to be a complete listing of works, but to represent a variety of national perspectives. In attempting to make the works readily

accessible, the annotated citations are arranged by author. There is a second listing of the same works by nationality, with anthologies listed first.

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The formation of individual identity merges with cultural and political issues in the lives of four generations of middle-class women in Chile up to the 1970s.

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An historical novel by the widely read Brazilian storyteller of life on cocoa plantations and the conflicts of exploited workers and the working class in Northeast Brazil's coastal cities.

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Twenty-one short stories of backlands life exploring man's relationship with the world and the importance of relativity rather than rationality in approaching life's mysteries.

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